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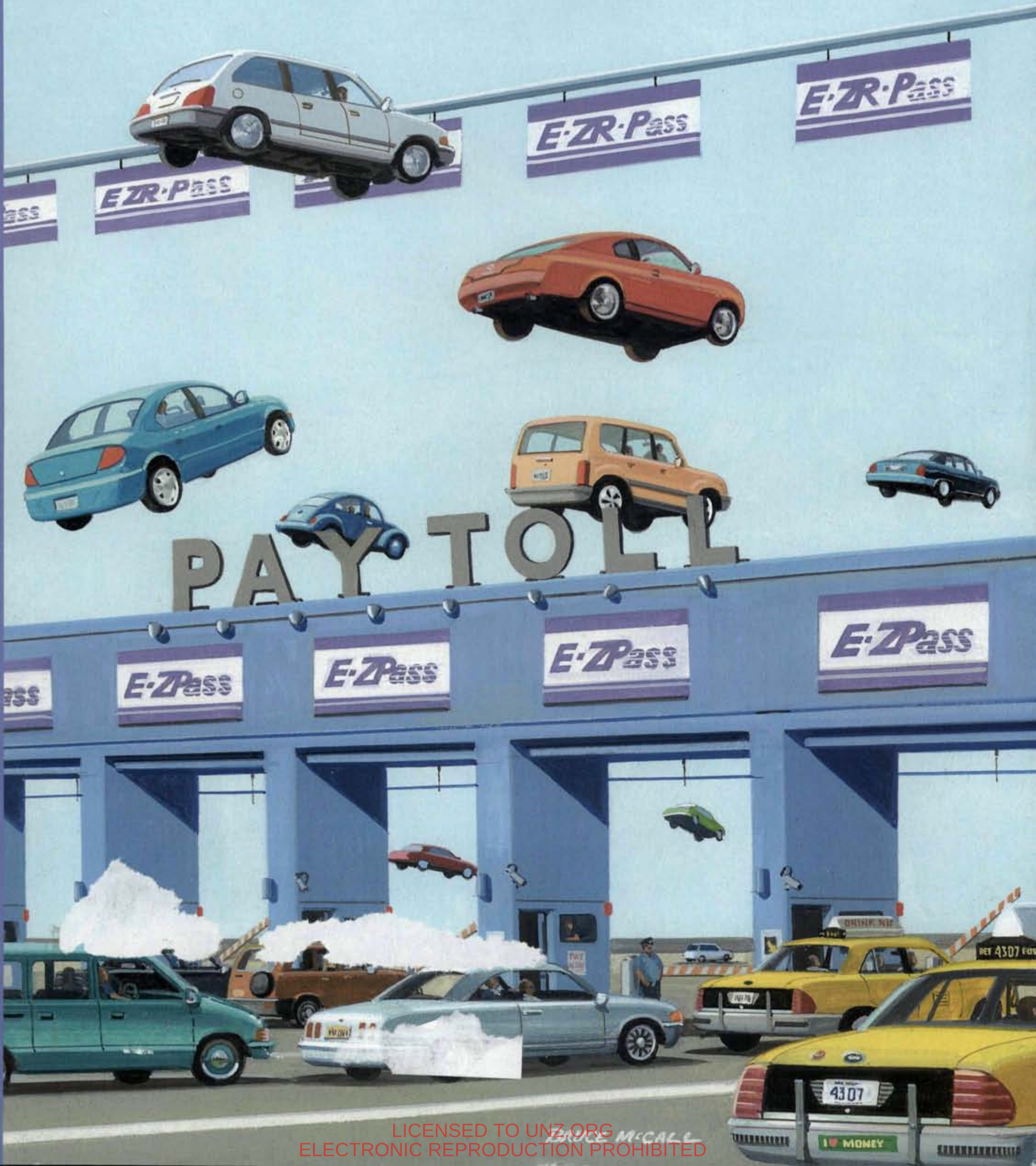
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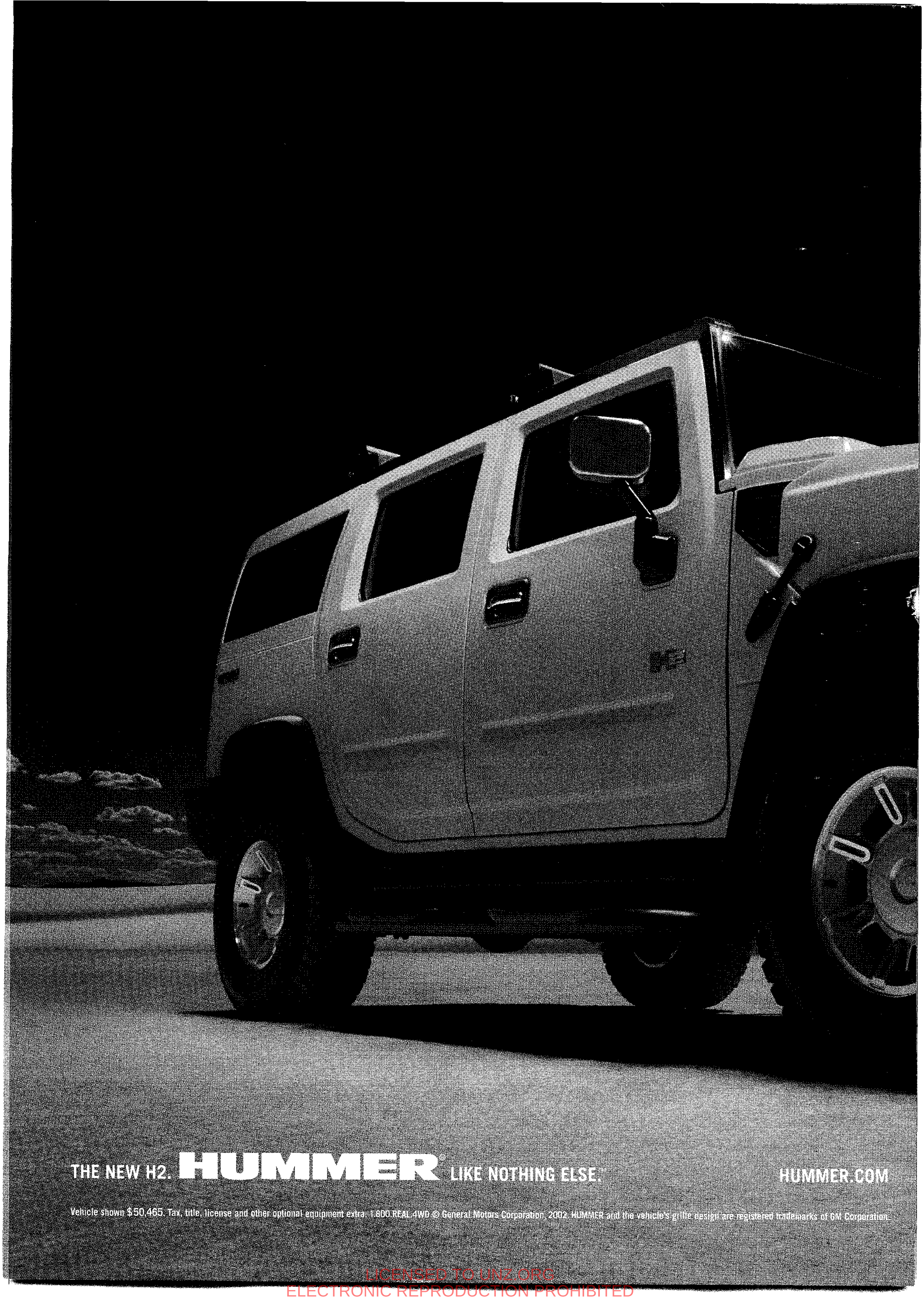
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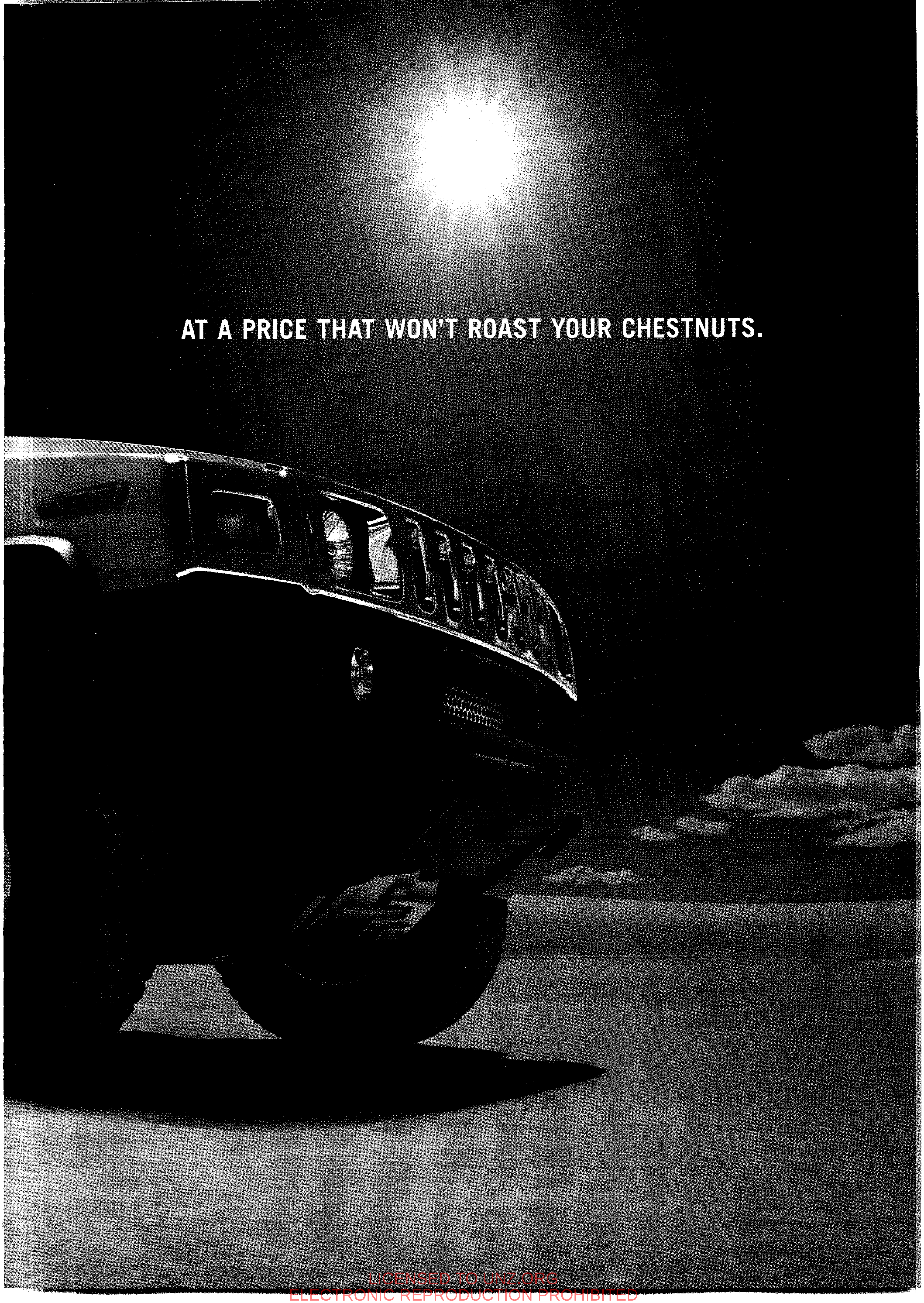
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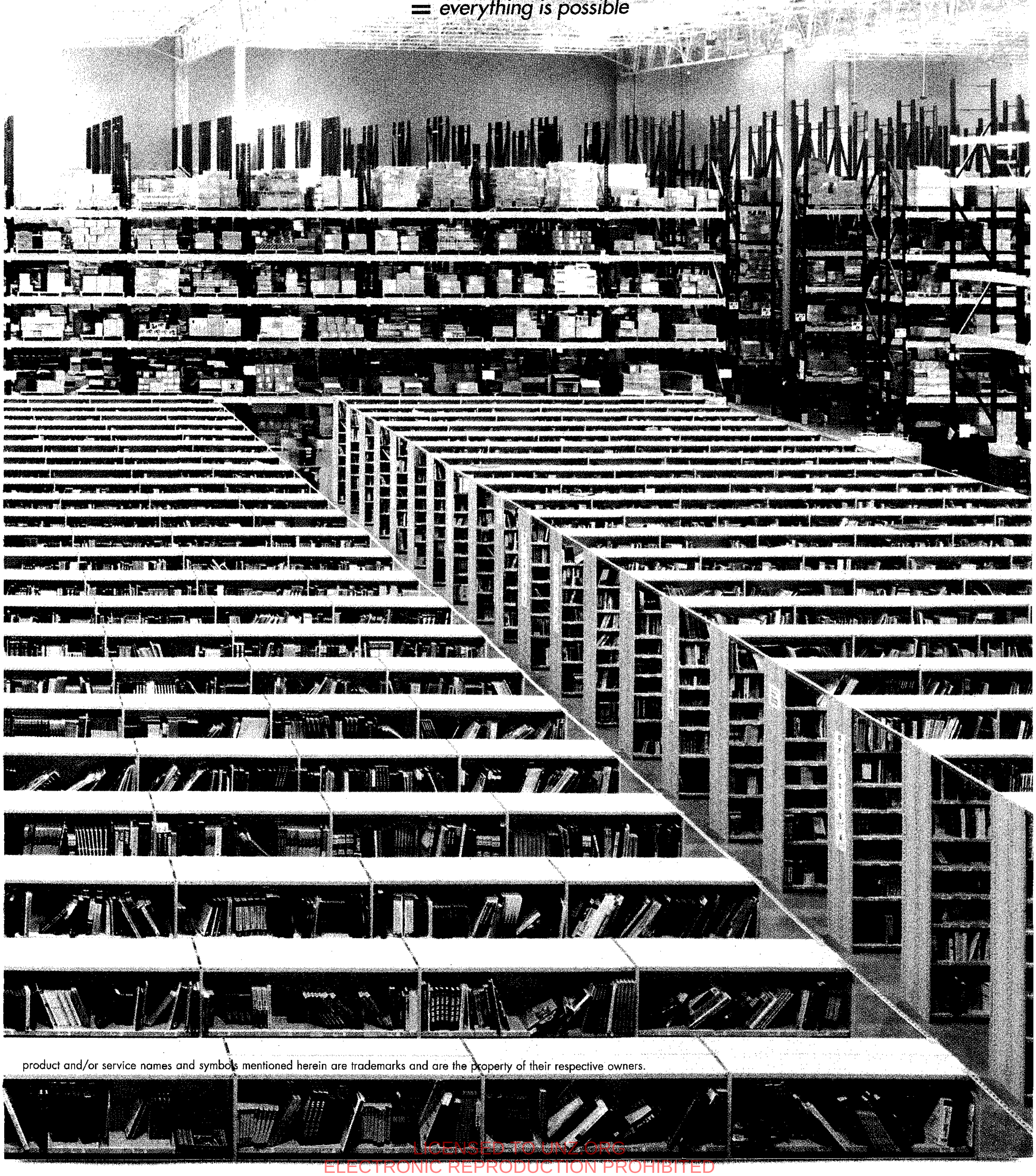

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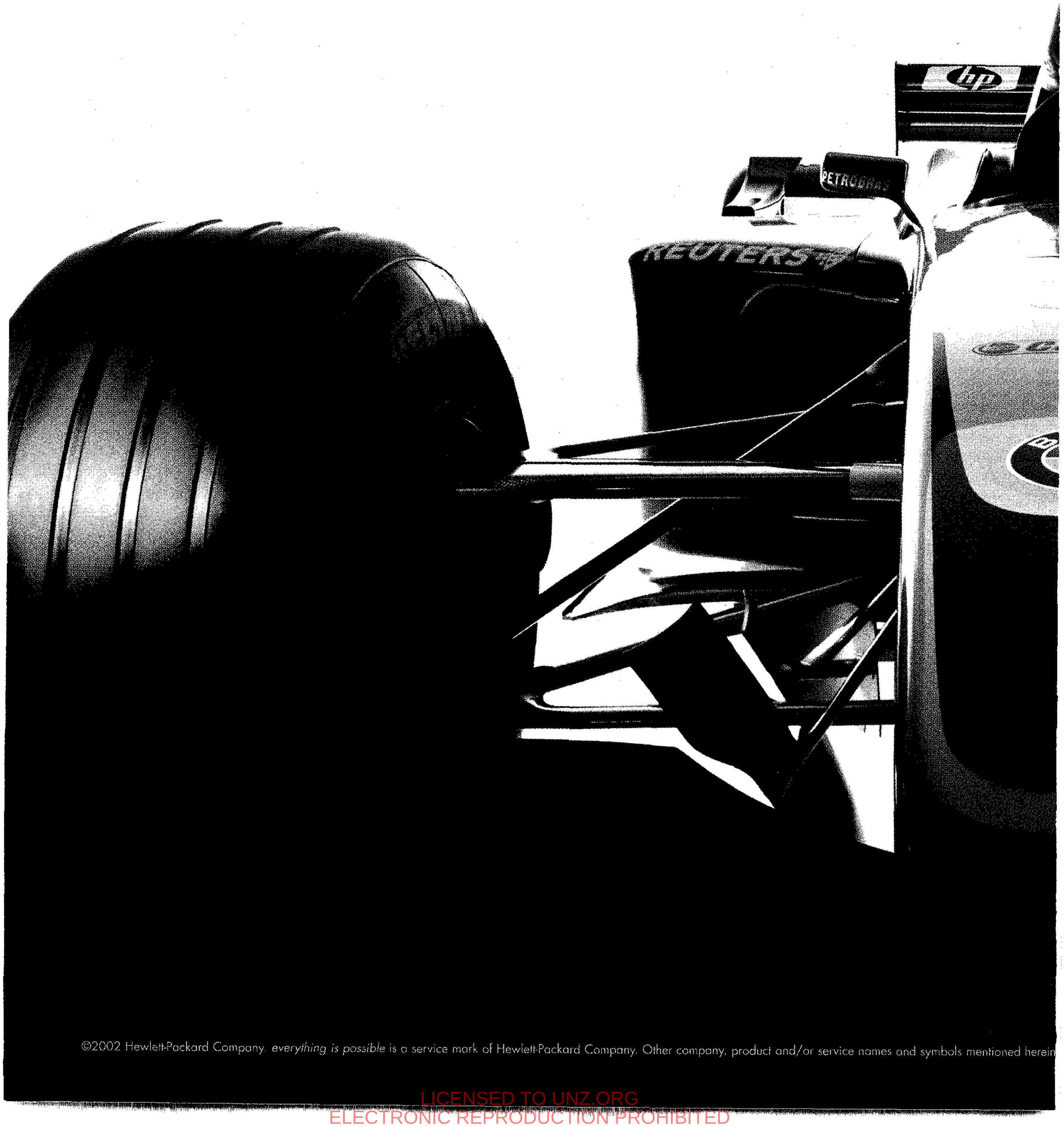
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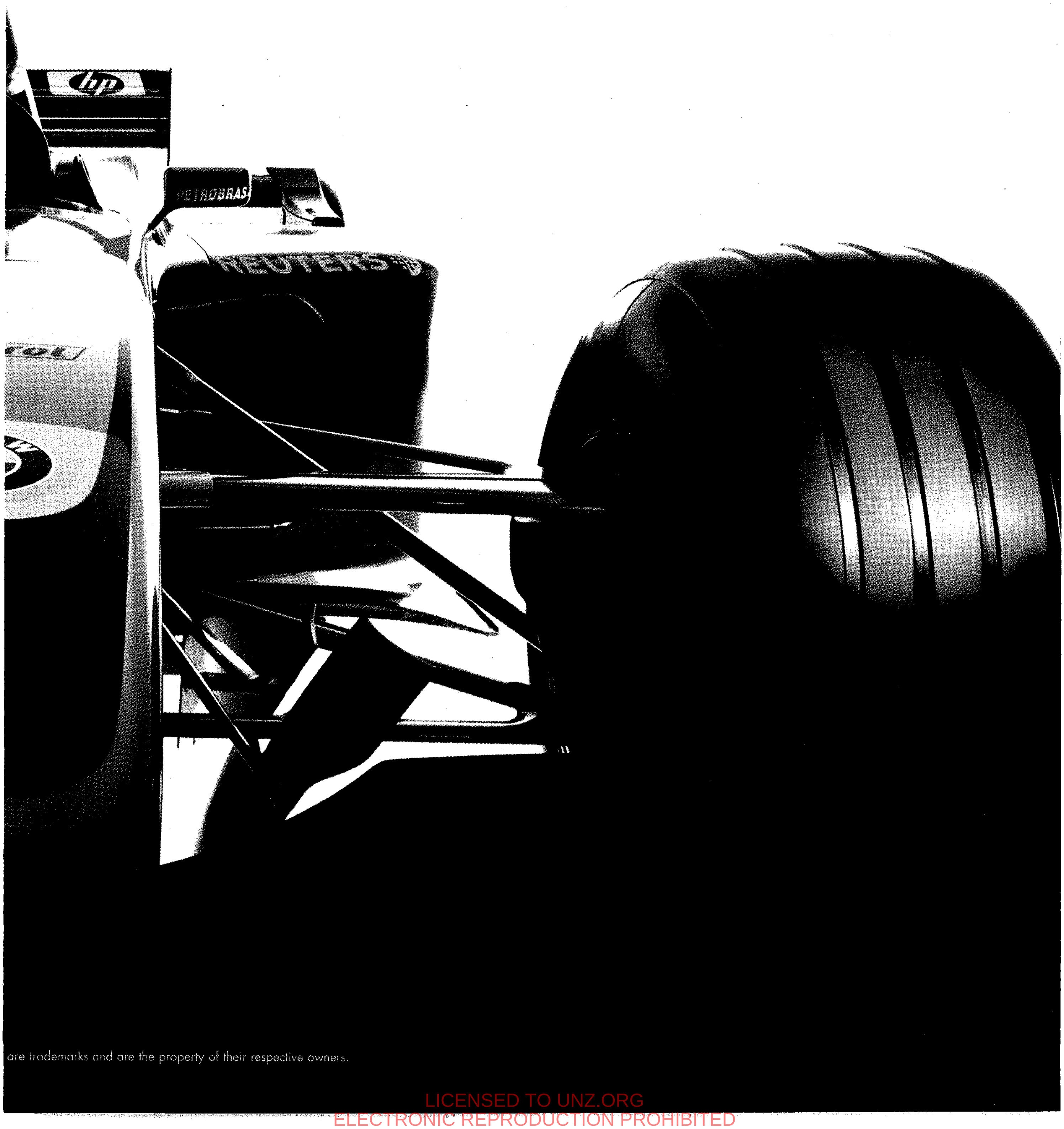

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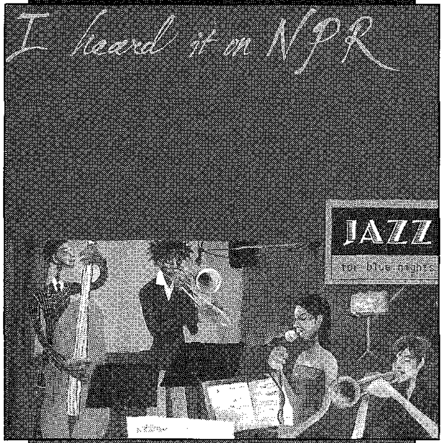

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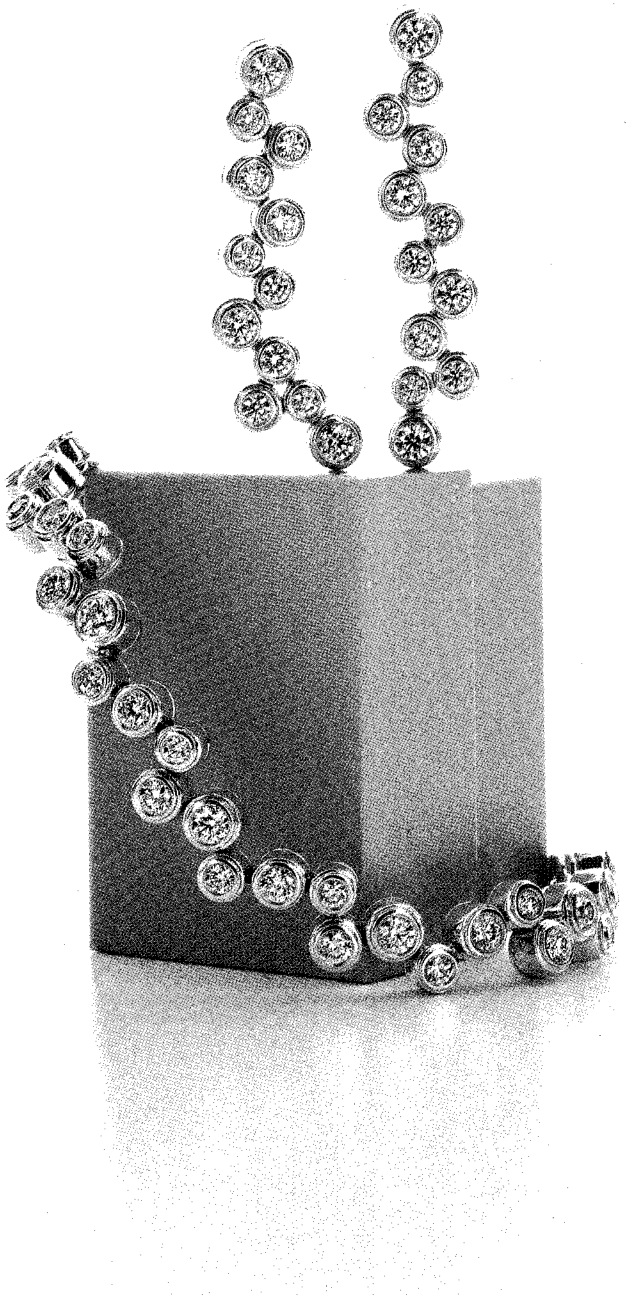

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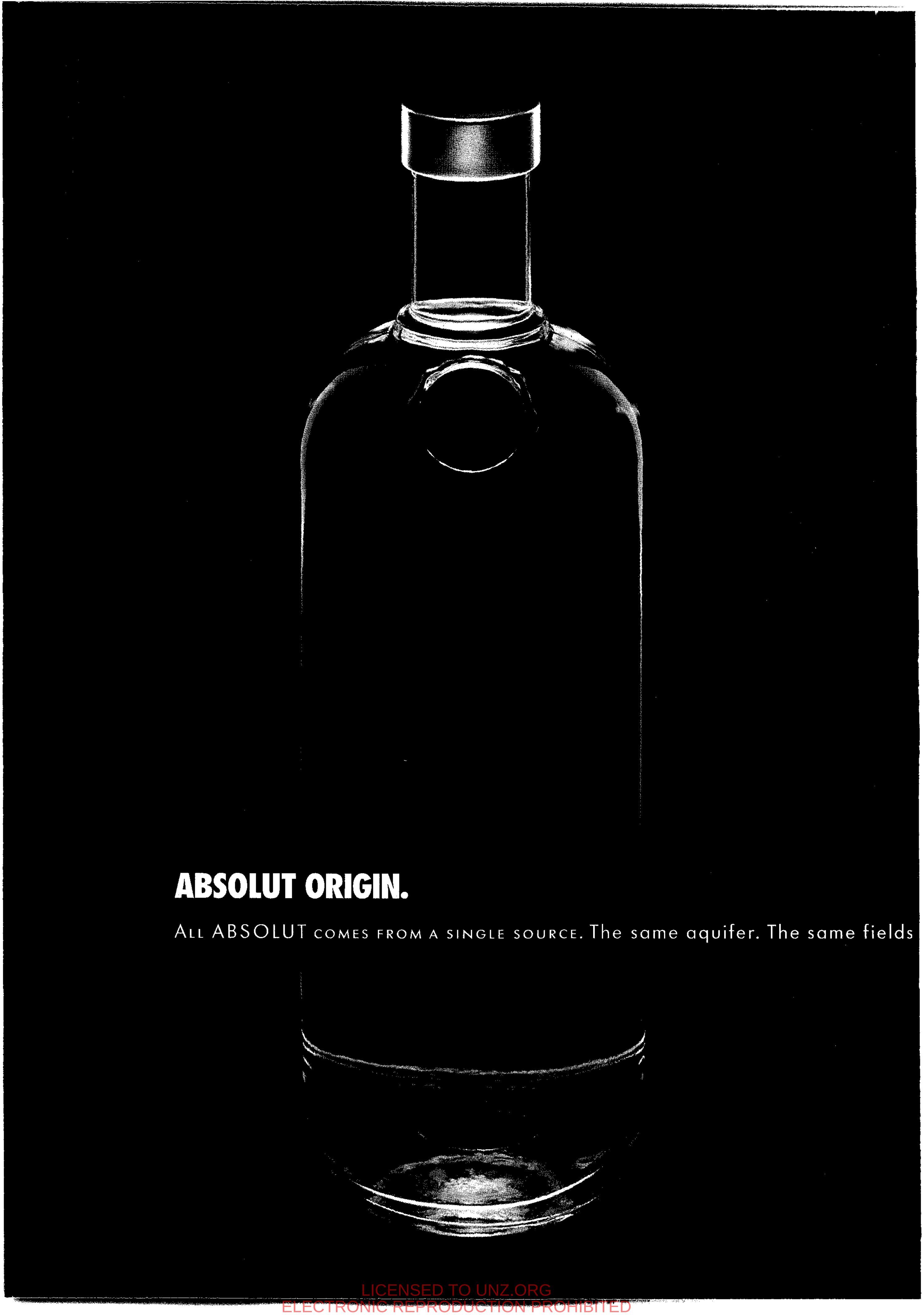
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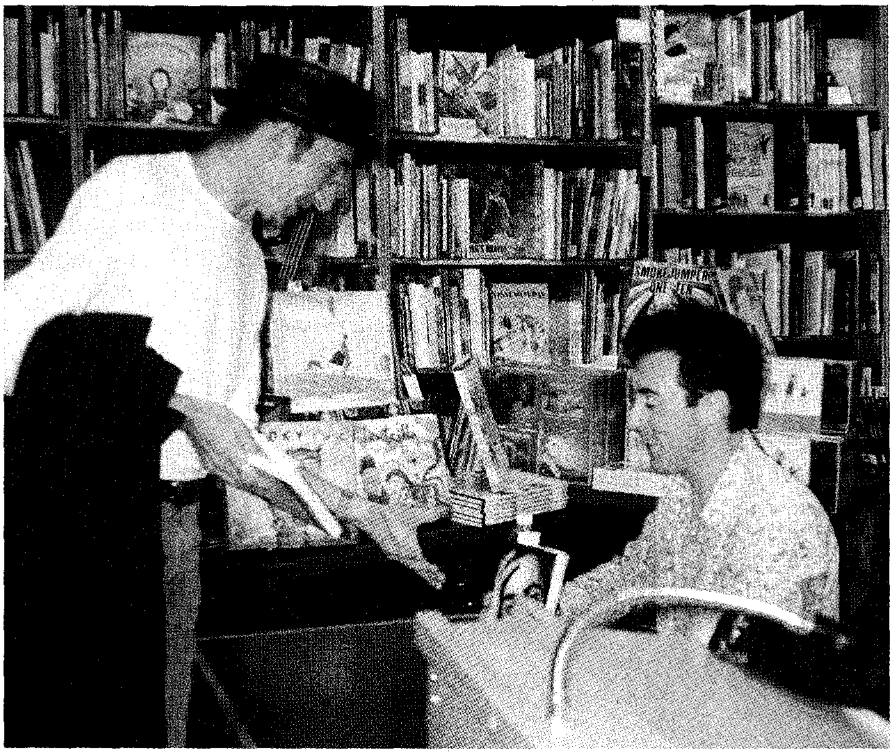
same name outside, what's inside each is determined exclusively by the staff," explains Linda Fitzgerald of **Barbara's Books**, which has several locations in Chicago as well as outposts in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. "From the book selection to the layout of the store to its events and programs, everything is determined by the staff's interaction with the many people who stop by." This philosophy characterizes the difference between small stores and major chains. "Our businesses thrive because we tailor our stores to the community rather than struggle to tailor the community to the store," notes Fitzgerald. "Customers recognize that and respond to it."

Jude Sales at San Francisco's **A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books** agrees. "People make this store happen. It's reflected in a collection that is eclectic and fun. Frequently a customer will tell us, 'I come here because of what you guys tell me to read. You've never steered me wrong.' " As with other independent booksellers, community involvement plays an active role in the store's agenda. It hosts in-store author readings, book fairs in schools, and even a popular Saturday morning book club. It has also helped support the local arts community, and has more than a semantic relationship with Word for Word, an avant-garde theatre troupe that performs every word of a written work's first chapter, right down to its articles.


courtesy of A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books

Screenwriter and Tony Award-winning actor Alan Cumming signs copies of his début novel "Tommy's Tale" at A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books' event in San Francisco.

The independent booksellers' rich sense of community transcends city limits to include the family of independent booksellers across the country. Many stores admired and supported the courageous First Amendment struggle that the popular Denver indie, **Tattered Cover Book Store**, waged to protect the privacy of its customers' book purchases. Eccentric author Lemony Snicket (a.k.a. Daniel Handler) invited his friends in the book world to gather for an unconventional benefit at A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books. Michael Chabon, Dorothy Allison, Dave Eggers, and others joined Snicket, and a

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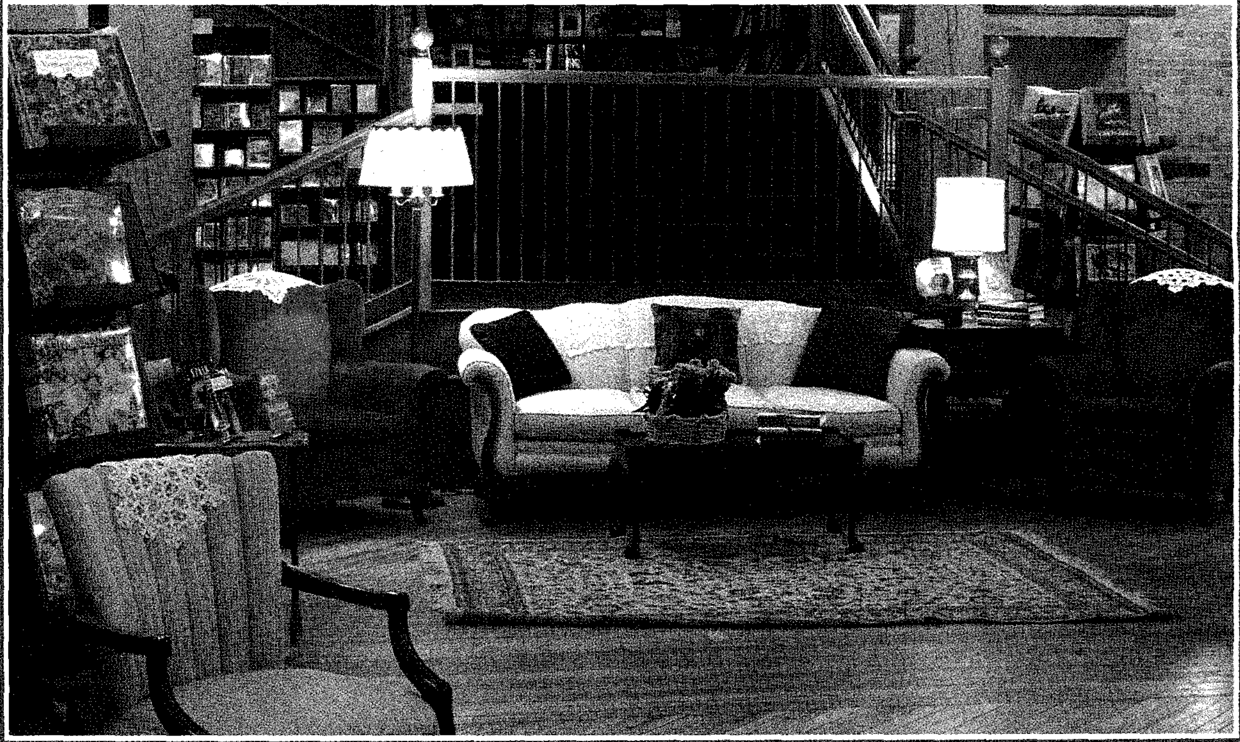
BOOKED FOR THE HOLIDAYS

By Douglas Chilcott

The frenetic barrage of holiday shopping choices can make checking off the items on even a modest Christmas list seem a trifle daunting. But the book-lined walls of your nearest independent bookstore may offer a haven that is both collegial and comforting. Greeted by a staff of inveterate book lovers, holiday shoppers can find helpful and informed gift ideas for even the most intractable relative or friend.

The symbiotic connection between book buyers and sellers doesn't occur by happenstance. The links that independent bookstores have forged with their communities make such auspicious interdependence possible. Not constrained by the marketing dictates of the major chains, independent booksellers are receptive and attentive to the needs of their communities. This applies even when an independent bookseller owns more than one store.

"The key is that even though all of our stores share the



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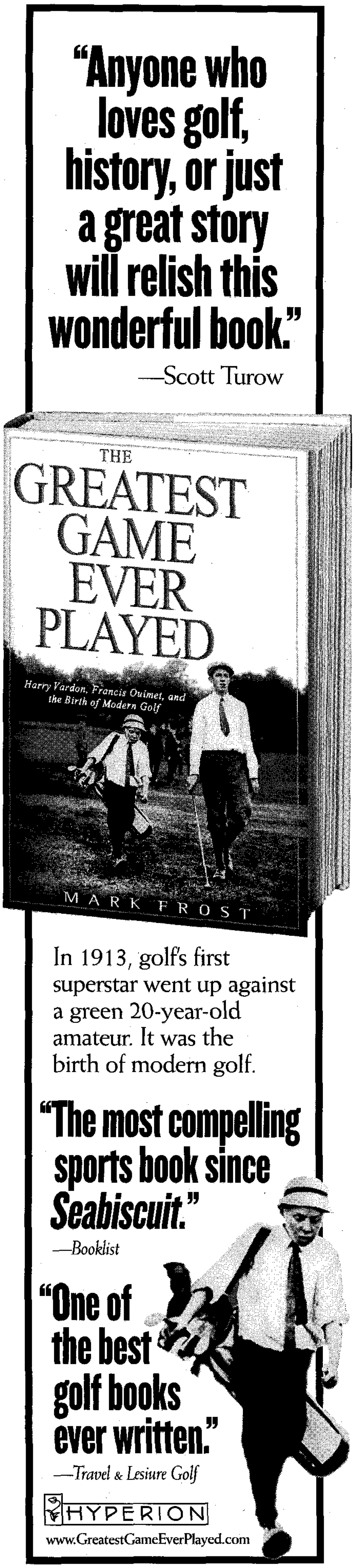
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CONTRIBUTORS

Susan Sontag (“Looking at War,” p. 82) will publish “Regarding the Pain of Others,” a book about images of violence, early next year.

Ari Shavit (“No Man's Land,” p. 56) is a columnist for the newspaper *Ha'aretz*. He lives in Jerusalem.

Nancy Franklin (The Talk of the Town, p. 50) writes the On Television column.

Kevin Conley (“Pointe Counterpointe,” p. 69) is the author of “Stud: Adventures in Breeding,” which comes out in paperback in the spring.

Joan Acocella (Books, p. 130) writes about books and dance for the magazine.

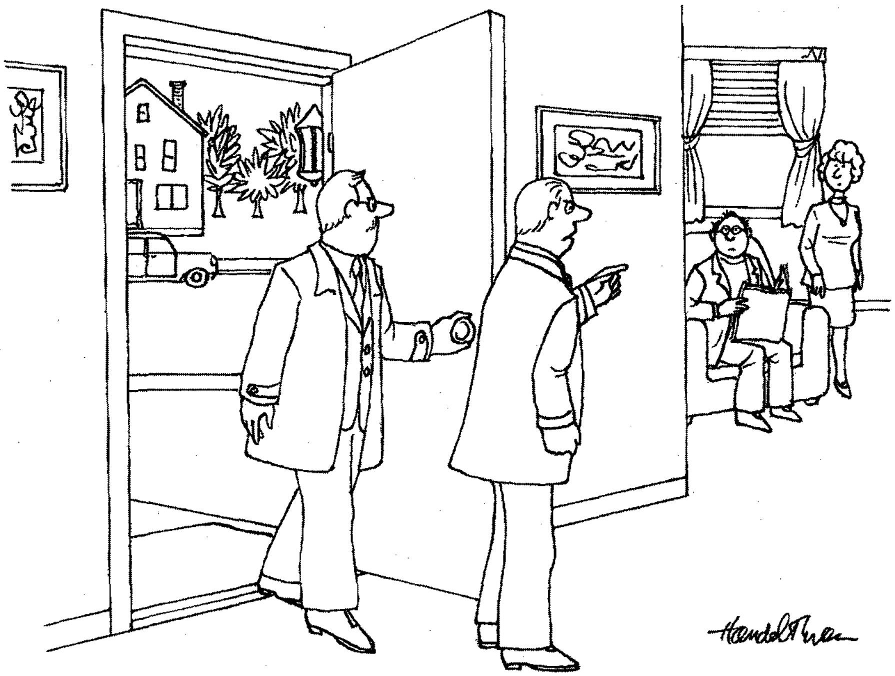
John Lahr (“Whirlwind,” p. 100) is the magazine's senior drama critic.

John Updike (Fiction, p. 110) has published twenty-two novels, including “Seek My Face,” which came out last month.

Ian Frazier (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 80) is a longtime contributor. His latest book is “The Fish's Eye,” a collection of essays about fishing and the outdoors.

Adam Gopnik (Books, p. 136) is the author of “Paris to the Moon.”

Paul Muldoon (Poem, p. 102) has published nine books of poetry, including, most recently, “Moy Sand and Gravel.” ♦



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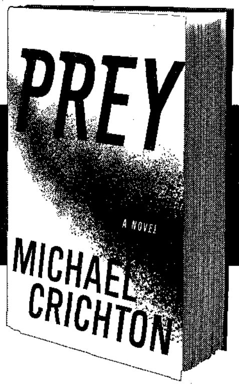
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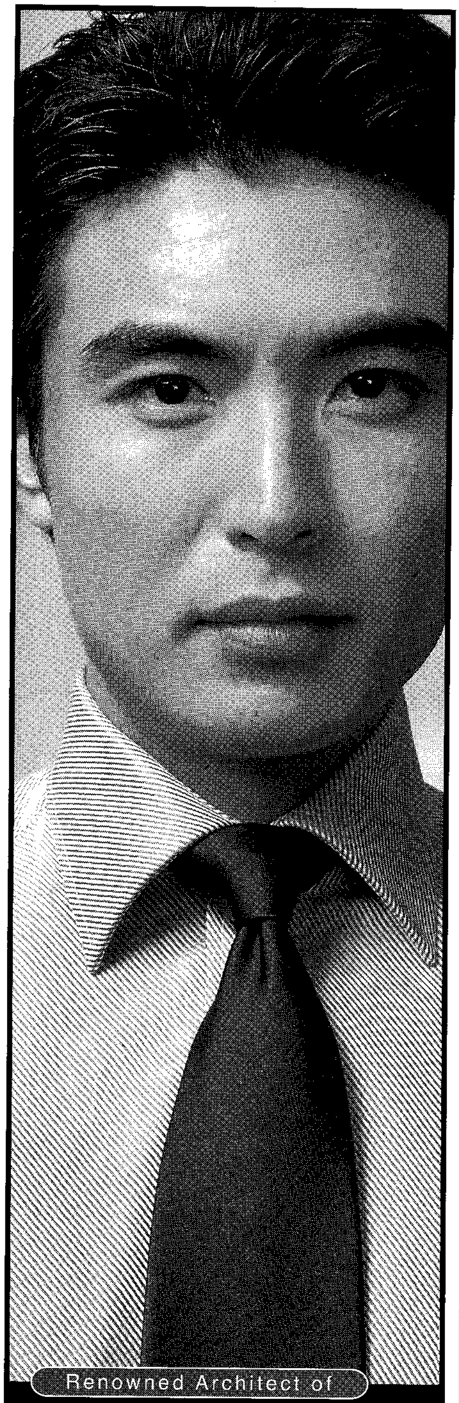

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A DIFFICULT WAR

Nicholas Lemann's "Letter from Washington" is absolutely frightening ("Order of Battle," November 18th). He quotes an analyst whose view, prevalent in Washington, is that "the combination of U.S. air and ground power is truly unstoppable. . . . This is it—the Roman legions, the German panzers. . . . Let's win the war and let it play out." This is the height of overconfidence. In 1968, I helped make operational the "McNamara Line," the electronic fence that was supposed to stop or at least slow the movement of North Vietnamese troops and supplies into South Vietnam. At the time, we had all the latest in equipment and firepower. We had control of the air and the sea, had large conventional forces on land, covert listening devices, laser-guided bombs, drone aircraft, and infrared snooper scopes. We had B-52 Arc Light carpet bombing, AC-130 gunships, chemicals to defoliate jungles and turn dirt roads into slippery quagmires, and many other fancy gadgets. We all felt, How can we lose? But we learned the cost of our hubris. Today, the Administration's spokesmen assume that we can easily trounce Iraq. One hopes that they have faced up to other possibilities.

Richard S. Greeley
St. Davids, Pa.

THE DNA RACE

Jim Holt's review of Brenda Maddox's biography of Rosalind Franklin, the British scientist whose work James Watson and Francis Crick borrowed—without her knowledge—to clinch their model of DNA, repeats the one flaw in Maddox's fine book: a too easy acceptance of Watson's view of Franklin's scientific abilities as limited (Books, October 28th). Franklin was a superb scientist; she had an exemplary publication record, designed most of her equipment, and had an extraordinary grasp of the possibilities of X-ray diffraction. She had also written up her "wet" B-form data on March 17, 1953, just before news of the Watson and Crick triumph broke. That paper is, essentially, the same one she published in *Nature* that April, where it was placed behind Watson and Crick's, giving the misleading impression that it merely confirmed their work, instead of making it possible. In fact, her notebooks show how close she was to the full discovery herself. She had not figured out base pairing, but was on to the two clues necessary to do so. Holt and Maddox are right to criticize Franklin's reluctance to publish intuitive guesses earlier, a trait she shared with many other women scientists, in part because the consequences, if they guessed wrong, were typically devastating, and not something to laugh over at the pub—as was the case with Watson and Crick's first, wildly incorrect model. But it would be wrong to mistake that hesitancy for a lack of intuitive ability.

Lynne Osman Elkin
Professor of Biological Sciences
California State University
Hayward, Calif.

THE REAL FIVE POINTS

Adam Gopnik writes that "one suspects one is being had" by Herbert Asbury, the author of "The Gangs of New York," and he's right (A Critic at Large, November 11th). The penny press Asbury relied on specialized in sensational portrayals of drunkards, libertines, and felons in the Five Points district which both drew on and fed the anti-Irish sentiment of the day. Since then, historians have shown that many of the area's residents were frugal, hardworking families struggling to make a go of it, despite low wages and overcrowding. Asbury fails to show Five Points as it was: a complex, vibrant, working-class immigrant neighborhood.

Carol Groneman
Professor of History
John Jay College of Criminal Justice
New York City

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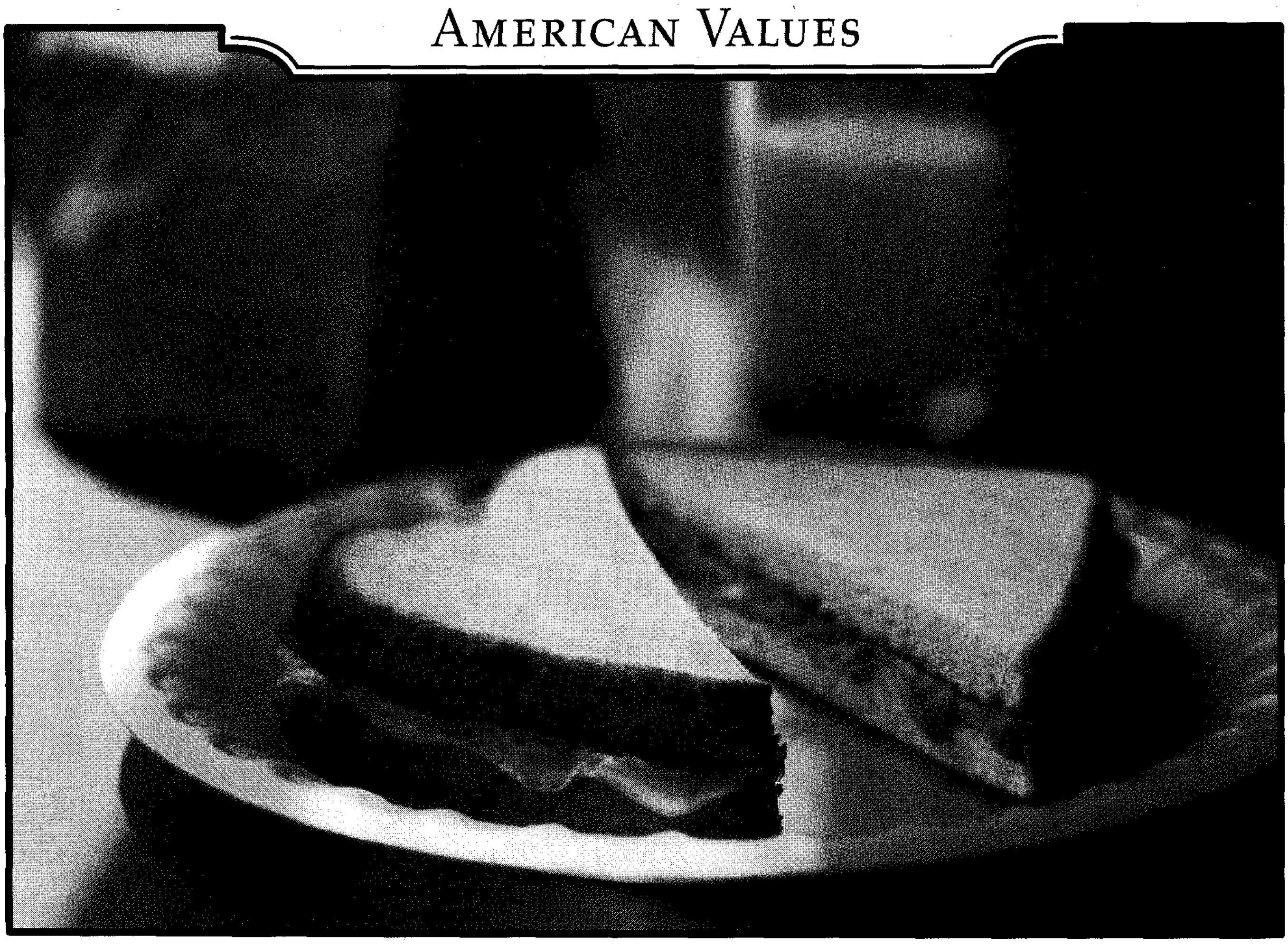

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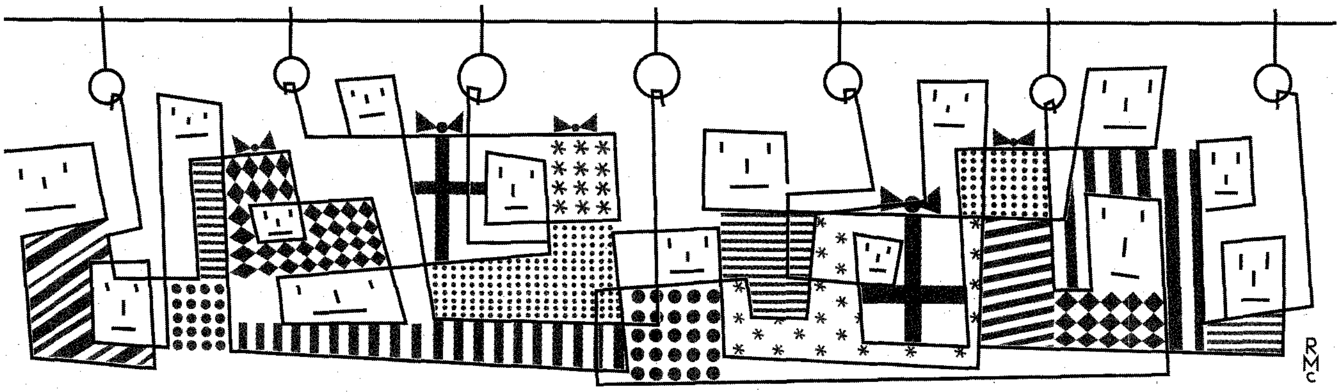

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

LA BOHÈME
Baz Luhrmann's production of Puccini's opera has arrived. Two previews on Dec. 7 at 2 and 8. Opens Dec. 8 at 6:30. (Broadway, 1681 Broadway, at 53rd St. 239-6200.)

CLASS MOTHERS '68
In a new comedy by Eric H. Weinberger, Priscilla Lopez plays six different mothers of high-school seniors. Directed by Jeremy Dobrish. In previews. Opens Dec. 9 at 8. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

DANCE OF THE VAMPIRES
A musical based on the 1967 Roman Polanski film, starring Michael Crawford, with music by Jim Steinman and a book by David Ives, Mr. Steinman, and Michael Kunze. John Rando is the director. In previews. Opens Dec. 9 at 6:30. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

DEMOCRACY IN ISLAM
In a drama by the Pakistani-American playwright Bina Sharif, members of an American Muslim family struggle with divorce, homosexuality, and fundamentalism. Opens Dec. 5 at 8. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave. 254-1109.)

ERNIE PYLE'S WAR
A curio for war buffs, Martin Treat's one-man show dramatizes Ernie Pyle's coverage of the Second World War. Opens Dec. 5 at 8. (Arthur Seleen Theatre, at the Drama Book Shop, 250 W. 40th St. 206-1515.)

HANK WILLIAMS: LOST HIGHWAY
Jason Petty plays the legendary country-and-Western singer in a musical biography directed by Randal Myler. Previews begin Dec. 9. (Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 239-6200.)

IMAGINARY FRIENDS
A new play about the literary feud between Lillian Hellman and Mary McCarthy, starring Swoosie Kurtz and Cherry Jones. Written by Nora Ephron, with music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Craig Carnelia. In previews. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

MAN OF LA MANCHA
Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio, Brian Stokes Mitchell, and Ernie Sabella star in a revival of the musical, directed by Jonathan Kent. Two previews on Dec. 4 at 2 and 8. Opens Dec. 5 at 6:45. (Martin Beck, 302 E. 45th St. 239-6200.)

MEDEA
Fiona Shaw returns to New York in the acclaimed Abbey Theatre production of the Euripides play, directed by Deborah Warner, which played recently at BAM. In previews. Opens Dec. 10 at 6:30. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

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THE SNOW QUEEN
Manhattan Children's Theatre presents a new version of the Hans Christian Andersen tale, written by Kristin Walter, with original music by Michael Walter. Opens Dec. 7 at noon. (380 Broadway, at White St. 352-3101.)

THE TEMPEST
The Pearl's season continues with Shakespeare's fantasy, directed by Padraic Lillis, with Rachel Botchan as Miranda and Robert Hock as Prospero. Opens Dec. 8 at 7. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

WHAT DIDN'T HAPPEN
Chris Noth leads the cast in a Playwrights Horizons production of a new play by Christopher Shinn. In previews. Opens Dec. 10 at 7. (The Duke, 229 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

BETTY RULES
A kinetic alterna-rock musical, directed by Michael Greif ("Rent"), chronicling the nearly two-decade-long career of a real-life girl band called Betty and its members' battle to keep the group and their sanity intact on the road, at home, onstage, and even in therapy. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 239-6200.)

BLISS
In this taut and riveting three-character play by Ben Bettenbender, Jo-Lynne (Johanna Day) hires Chick (Rob Sedgwick), a gas-station attendant and ex-convict, to kill Curtis (Peter Jay Fernandez), the man who murdered her husband and got off scot-free. "Bliss" winds up being more about rhetoric than about action, and the actors have a strong grip on the rhythm of Bettenbender's crackling dialogue, which recalls the work of David Mamet. While the climax does not quite satisfy the promise of what has come before it, there is much to admire here, from Julia Gibson's intimate staging to Sedgwick's vigorous performance to the playwright's agile juxtaposing of the dark and the darkly comic. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 206-1515.)

BLUE/ORANGE
At the outset of Joe Penhall's sharply funny new play, a young white psychiatrist consults his supervisor about whether he should send a young black psychiatric patient home. Their debate—over whether it's patronizing to consider the man sick in the first place—quickly spirals out of control. Penhall's script undercuts a lot of cant about race, psychiatry, power, and self-delusion, and Neil Pepe's deft direction magnifies the evening's theatrical and intellectual satisfactions. The characters are well drawn, and excellently acted, with Harold Perrineau, Jr., as the patient, Glenn Fitzgerald as the junior doctor, and Zeljko Ivanek as the mentor. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

BOOK OF DAYS
Lanford Wilson's adroit and compelling yarn, directed by Marshall W. Mason, conjures up a bright and barbarous Middle America—"Our Town" meets "The Fall of the House of Usher." (Reviewed in our issue of 11/18/02.) (Signature Theatre, 555 W. 42nd St. 244-7529.)

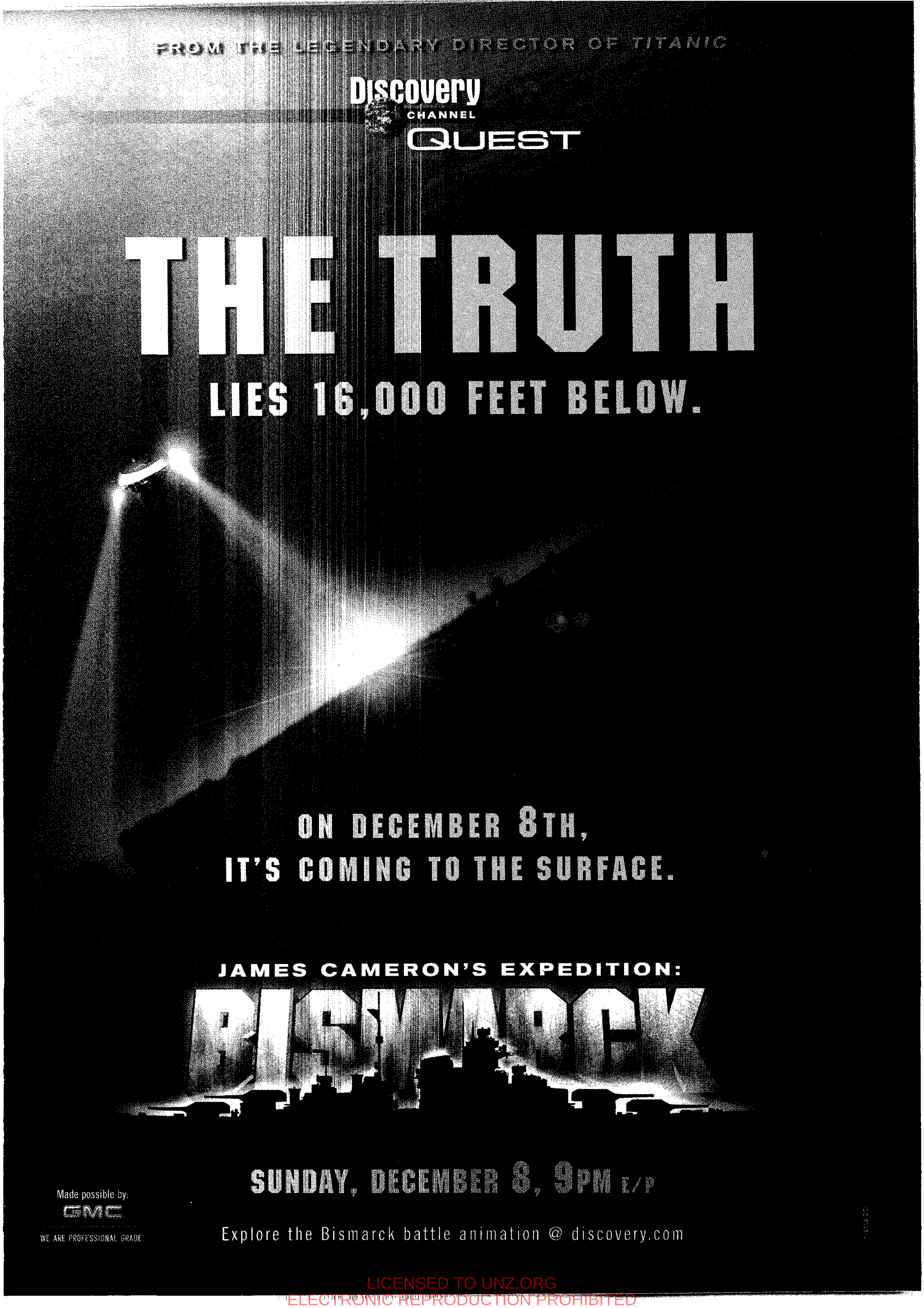
BOSTON MARRIAGE
Kate Burton and Martha Plimpton chew the scenery in David Mamet's genteelly bawdy, mot-a-minute drawing-room comedy about two late-nineteenth-century lesbians, directed by Karen Kohlhaas. To echo the Mamet script: "Could such a Byzantine rodomontade succeed?" Yes, with reservations: the play is stilted but not unenjoyable—particularly for wordsmiths. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

CELEBRATING SONDHEIM
Mandy Patinkin returns to Broadway to sing from the Sondheim songbook, accompanied by the pianist Paul Ford. Through Jan. 6. (Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

CHASHAMALAND
A grab bag of neo-vaudeville offerings are clustered under one roof at Chashama. Shows include a clown routine called "Happy Hour," a variety act called "The Golden Age," and the Bindlestiff Family Cirkus—which features elements of sideshow and burlesque. (135 W. 42nd St. 877-246-3537.)

FAR AWAY
In Caryl Churchill's thrilling fable, a not-too-distant totalitarian society is engaged in a war of all against all. Humans, animals, nations, insects, the elements—even gravity—make and break alliances, with bloody consequences. The show's vivid, nightmarish centerpiece, a fashion parade of the condemned, knocks the breath out of the audience. The exceptional cast includes Frances McDormand, Marin Ireland, and Chris Messina. The show is not to be missed. Directed by Stephen Daldry. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 239-6200.)

FLOWER DRUM SONG
Part fashion show, part night-club act, part hymn to Asian-American diversity, David Henry Hwang's update of the 1958 Rodgers and Hammerstein show, set in San Francisco's Chinatown, works far better than the original. With snazzy direction and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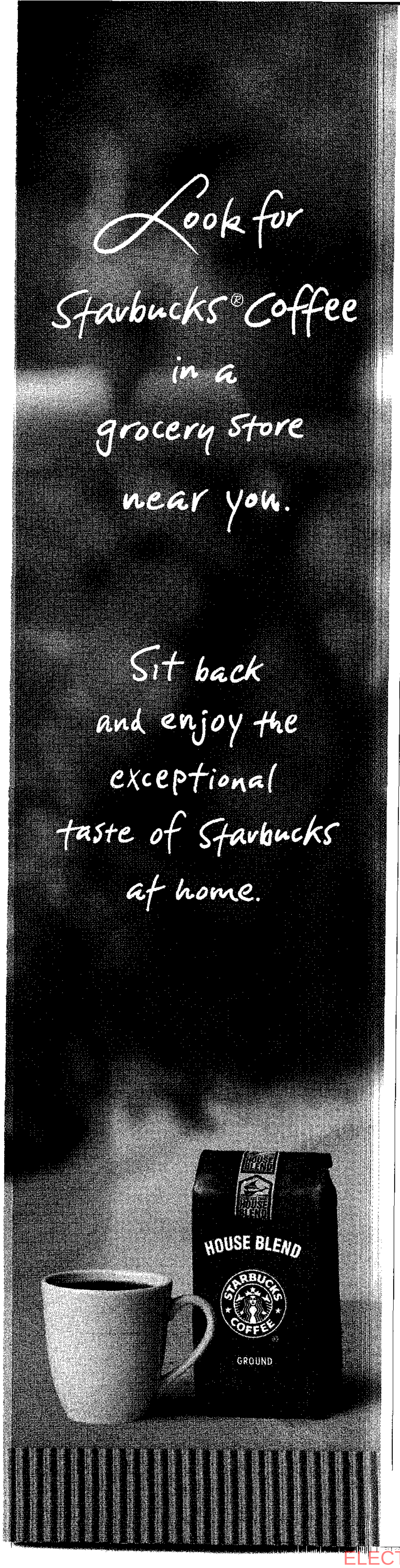
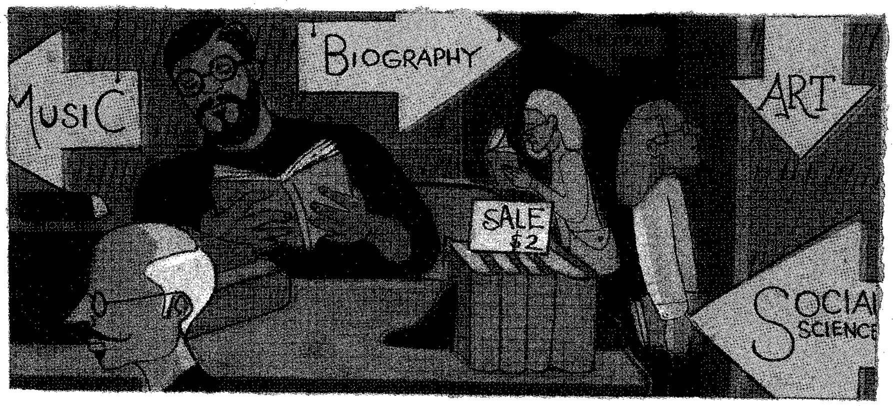


ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Now Paging

Steve Crowley is the first to admit that his bookstore's success has a lot to do with what he calls "Strand spillover." Having that behemoth right around the corner from his shop, **ALABASTER BOOKS** (122 Fourth Ave.; 982-3550), insures a steady stream of patrons. "Once people come in, they usually find something. We're sort of arts and literature, but we stock all categories," Crowley says, sitting behind an old wooden desk that holds a Chopin bust ("I thought it looked bookstore-y—it's actually plastic") and a selection of paperbacks laid out to lure customers, including, on a recent afternoon, a bright-pink copy of Pauline Kael's "Kiss Kiss Bang Bang" ($5) and an edition of "Lennon: Up Close and Personal" featuring an impossibly youthful John and Yoko on the cover ($4). Crowley was a musician working in an Upper West Side bookstore to pay the bills when he opened Alabaster, six years ago. "You know, this used to be bookstore row," he says. "People still come in all the time and say, 'Did you know there used to be fifty bookstores along here?' Now there's me."

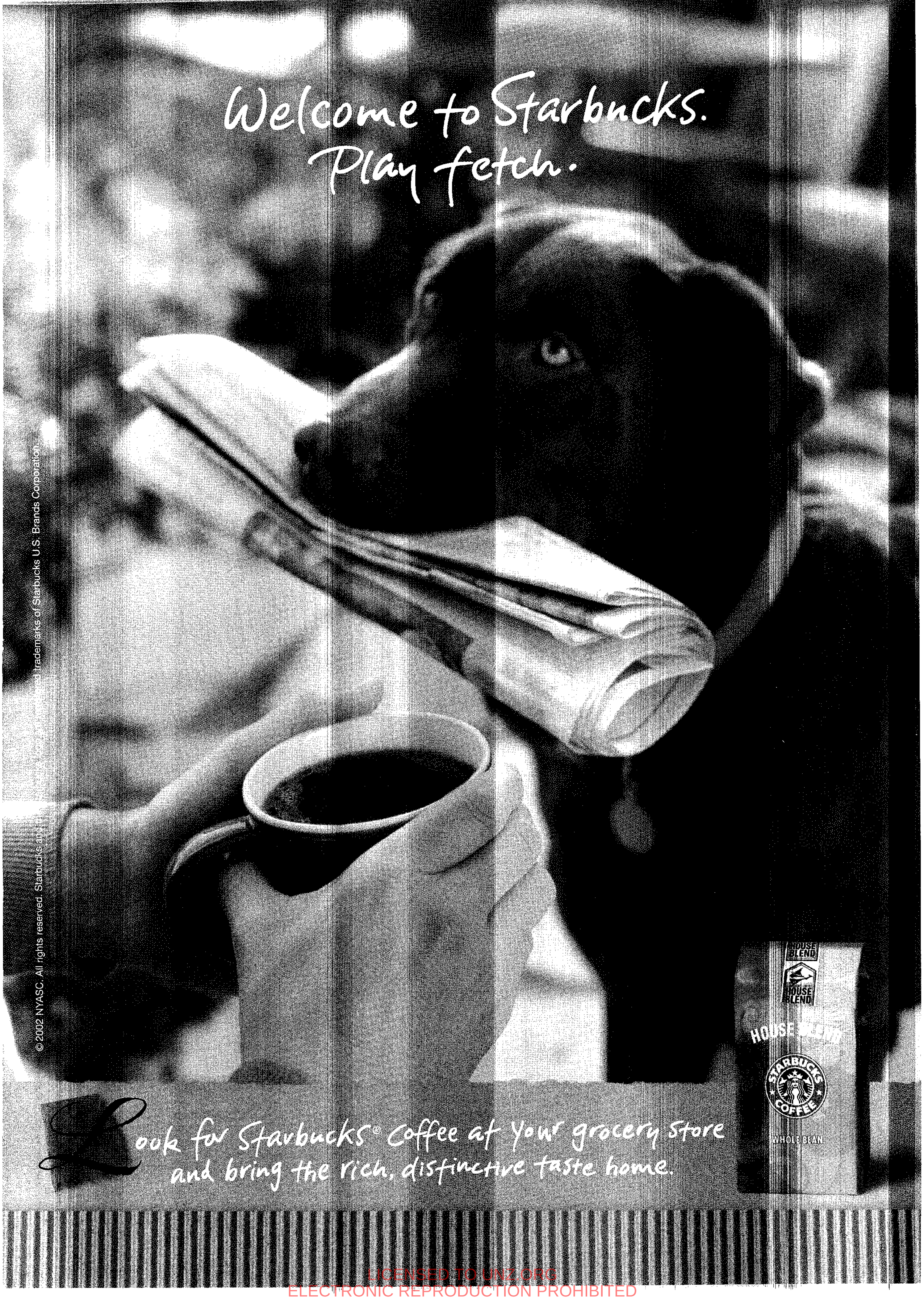


Though **SKYLINE BOOKS & RECORDS** (13 W. 18th St.; 759-5463) has been in Chelsea for only twelve years, the place feels like it's been around since the fifties, long before Bed Bath & Beyond opened on the corner. "We try to keep that balance between unkempt and orderly," says Rob Warren, the owner, surveying his domain, a scruffy, comfortable place with an exhaustive Beat Generation section just inside the front door. "My tastes are literary first editions and sixties stuff—and photography," Warren says, opening a case to show off volumes he's especially taken with: a first edition of Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" ($2,500), a signed copy of Avedon's "Portraits" ($200), Updike's "Rabbit, Run" with its distinctive striped green cover ($1,000), a "Frankenstein" that has woodcuts by Lynd Ward ($150). "Ward is a favorite of ours," Warren says. "Oh, and we just got in this copy of Céline's 'Death on the Installment Plan.' It has a very nice dust jacket."

At **BONNIE SLOTNICK COOKBOOKS** (163 W. 10th St.; 989-8962), there are a lot of things you don't usually see in a bookstore: a circa-1922 Home Pride enamel stove, a checked, enamel-top kitchen table, and any number of eggcups, saltshakers, and pot holders. Slotnick, who's been in the business for eighteen years, has an impressive collection of volumes about Manhattan restaurants. "I have books about Sardi's and Patricia Murphy and Rector's, and something called the 'Greenwich Village Cookbook' from 1969—of the seventy-five restaurants in the index, I counted around fifteen that are still in business," she says. "Look at this wonderful turn-of-the century cookbook by 'Oscar' of the Waldorf. The introduction is so humble if you compare it to a book written by a chef today." Slotnick also has a 1931 rarity called "Fashions in Foods in Beverly Hills" ($100) that features recipes contributed by celebrities, among them a submission from Clara Bow which proves that the It Girl was no gourmet. Her Baked Macaroni à la Lil requires just three ingredients—one package of macaroni, one package of grated American cheese, and a can of tomatoes.

—*Lynn Yaeger*

EDEL RODRIGUEZ



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choreography by Robert Longbottom and vivacious dancing by Sandra Allen. (11/4/02) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

THE FOURTH SISTER

In Janusz Glowacki's audacious new play, a black comedy set in money-grubbing modern Moscow, bandits are businessmen, virgins are for sale, and even the tiger in the Moscow zoo gets ripped off daily. Three sisters (nothing like Chekhov's) are played by Jessica Hecht, Marin Hinkle, and Alicia Goranson—the normal fourth sister is the sullen houseboy, played by Jase Blankfort. Directed by Lisa Peterson. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303.)

THE FOURTH WALL

There's applause for the politics and big yuks for the gags in A. R. Gurney's updated version of his 1992 play, stylishly directed by David Saint. While denouncing the decay of the government, the environment, and the theatre, Gurney manages to soundly entertain—with the aid of four brilliant performers (Sandy Duncan, Charles Kimbrough, David Pittu, and Susan Sullivan). (Primary Stages, 353 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE

Edie Falco and Stanley Tucci star in Terrence McNally's sentimental two-character study about a man and a woman marginalized by life. Joe Mantello directs. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE GENERAL FROM AMERICA

Like "Schoolhouse Rock," minus the rock, Richard Nelson's Revolutionary War drama about the traitor Benedict Arnold combines a history lesson with entertainment, stinting the latter. On a sparse set, lit chiefly by candles, the general, played with fitful energy by Corin Redgrave, bemoans his ill treatment by General Washington, fawns on his frostily pragmatic young bride (Yvonne Woods), and cozies up to the English. Nicholas Kepros gives a striking performance as Sir Henry Clinton, the commander of the British Army in America, who despised Arnold, and Paul Anthony McGrane shines as Sir Henry's beloved protégé, John Andre. Still, the real stars of this show are the set, the lighting, and the sound. In a tar-dark theatre, the audience strains to catch the lesson unfolding before them by candlelight—muted flickers of pewter and steel, the rustle of wool and wig, the creak of wood, and an echo of alehouses behind dim doors. It feels like spying on a memory of another century. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

GHOSTS

The reason to see the Classic Stage production of Ibsen's play is not the new Lanford Wilson translation of it, which often clunks ("Just shut up and listen for once!," "Aw, that was the booze talkin' "), it is Amy Irving's luminous rendition of Mrs. Alving, and the surprising evolution of her relationship with her sickly son, played with a fascinating brand of epicene virility by Ted Schneider. (136 E. 13th St. 677-4210, ext. 13.)

HAIRSPRAY

This musical-comedy version of the 1988 John Waters movie takes off from the opening number and never loses its momentum. In Baltimore in 1962, the rotund teen Tracy Turnblad (Marissa Jaret Winokur) wants to dance, make out with the best-looking boy in town, and integrate "The Corny Collins Show," a local teen-dance TV program. With the great Harvey Fierstein, plucked, shaved, and padded, as Tracy's mother, Edna Turnblad. (9/2/02) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

HENRY V

In the Jean Cocteau Repertory's production of Shakespeare's epic war story, the battle is fought not on the grounds of Agincourt but on the battlefields of Vietnam—complete with bamboo sets, frighteningly real sound effects, and anti-war sixties rock. The players, led by Jason Crowl as Henry, handle the language of the script with terrific ease and ably convey the vanity of the kings who wage war and the brashness of the young soldiers who die for them. A timely and provocative piece, directed by David Fuller. (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

HOLLYWOOD ARMS

Carol Burnett's slightly fictionalized memoir, written with her late daughter, Carrie Hamilton, stars Linda Lavin and is directed by Harold Prince. (11/18/02) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

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Welcome back to the jungle: Guns N' Roses returns (see Night Life—Concerts).

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

MOVIN' OUT

Twyla Tharp's show about small-town teen-agers coming of age during the Vietnam War era is set to twenty-seven songs by Billy Joel. The band is terrific, and the dancers—above all, John Selya as the hero, Eddie—are positively on fire. (11/4/02) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

RUSSELL SIMMONS' DEF POETRY JAM ON BROADWAY

The hip-hop legend has brought together spoken-word stylists from his HBO show and from the national poetry-slam circuit to create an exuberant, defiant production. As the d.j. Tendaji Lathan spins both old- and new-"skool" tunes, the rap bards deliver poems that are part autobiography, part social commentary—addressing everything from love, America, racism, and terrorism to Krispy Kreme donuts. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

SAY GOODNIGHT, GRACIE

Frank Gorshin is George Burns in Rupert Holmes's touching one-man tribute to the unsinkable comic and his more-than-a-sidekick wife, Gracie Allen. It's not just a showcase for one man; it's a showcase for an era. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE

Based on Mitch Albom's best-selling book, the play is a love song to a wise old professor who taught an unreflective younger man how to feel. Alvin Epstein plays the mentor—Morrie Schwartz—with wit and heart, and John Tenney is touching as Mitch, the brusque mentee. Directed by David Esbjornson. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

YENTL

The venerable Folksbiene Yiddish Theatre offers a charming production of the play by Leah Napolin and Isaac Bashevis Singer about a young woman who wants to study Torah so much that she disguises herself as a man. Eleanor Reissa, as the title character, leads a strong cast. In Yiddish, with simultaneous translation. (45 E. 33rd St. 307-4100.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

The boys and girls at the Christmas party brim with Russian verve and pluck, and the candies, fairies, and flowers are fragrant with the bloom of romance in Balanchine's "Nutcracker." Tchaikovsky wrote the music at the peak of his powers as a fabulist, and Balanchine's ballet rose to meet it. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 870-5570. Dec. 4-5 at 6, Dec. 6 at 8, Dec. 7 at 2 and 8, Dec. 8 at 1 and 5, and Dec. 10 at 6.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE

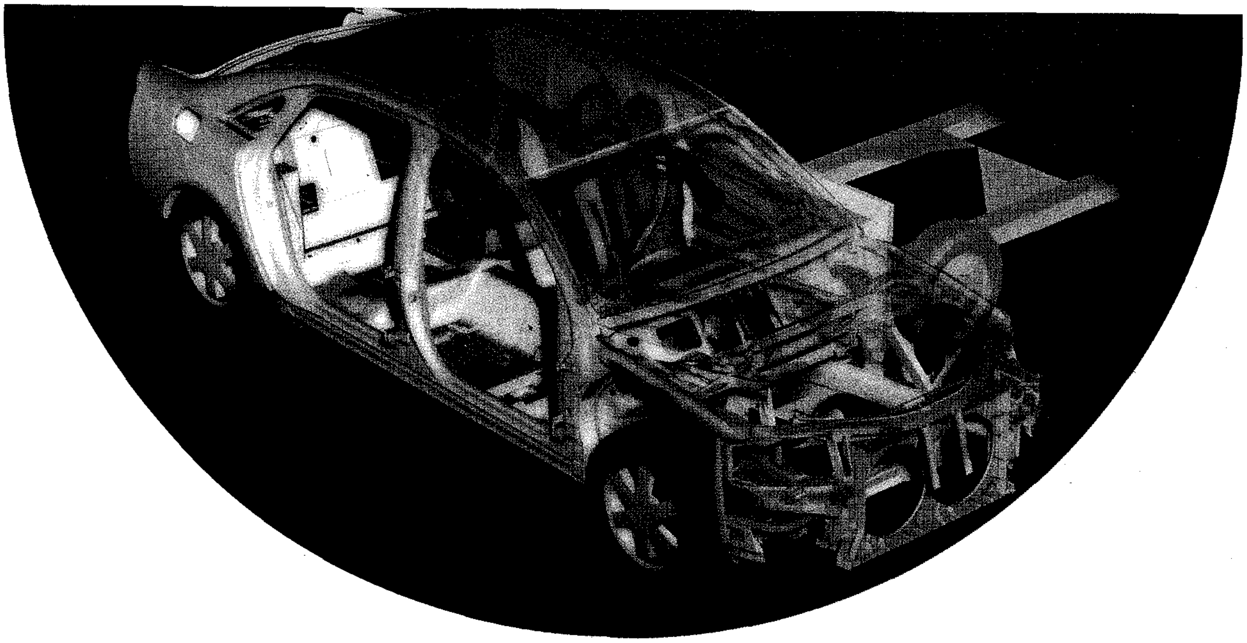
The Ailey dancers sometimes perform their emotive repertory with such polish that the viewer slides off the surface. The tall, sinuous Asha Thomas, who has been with the company for three years and dances with alert intelligence, executes the movement as if it were a thought she just had. "If I'm true to the choreography," she says, "I can give in to the truth of the moment." She appears in every show this week, and plays a lead in the Lynne Taylor-Corbett première, "Prayers from the Edge." The company performs this and twenty other works during its five-week season. Dec. 4 at 7: "Prayers from the Edge," "Love Songs," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 5 at 8: "Serving Nia," "Dance at the Gym," and "Caravan." ♦ Dec. 6 at 8: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Love Songs," "Apex," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 7 at 2: "Caravan," "Apex," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 7 at 8: "Prayers from the Edge," "Dance at the Gym," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 8 at 3: "Following the Subtle Current Upstream," "Love Songs," "Serving Nia," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 8 at 7:30: "Caravan," "Prayers from the Edge," and "Revelations." ♦ Dec. 10 at 8: "The Winter in Lisbon," "The River," and "Revelations." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Through Jan. 5.)

TRISHA BROWN DANCE COMPANY

The highlight of the troupe's season is a staging of Schubert's "Winterreise," sung by the baritone Simon Keenlyside, in which the dancers either interpret his words or enter the drama. Performances of "Winterreise" alternate with an evening of première and repertory works in Brown's usual, abstract mode. (John Jay College Theatre, 899 Tenth Ave. 721-6500. Dec. 4, Dec. 6-7, and Dec. 9 at 8. Through Dec. 14.)

BALLET HISPANICO

Ballet Hispanico's repertory has always favored works that fuse modern, ballet, and Latin forms, and, in his seventeen years with the company, Pedro Ruiz has paid attention. "Cecilia," his third creation for the troupe and his first narrative, is based on a nineteenth-century Cuban novel in which a nobleman's wife gives birth to a son and his dark-skinned mistress bears him a daughter—the Cecilia of the title. The two children fall in love. In his dance, Ruiz emphasizes Cuba's mixed heritage, making Cecilia's second suitor Cuban-intel.com/ad/audi



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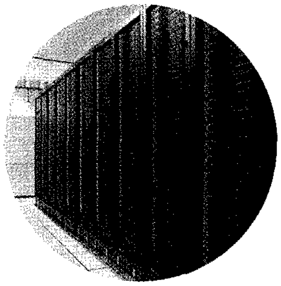

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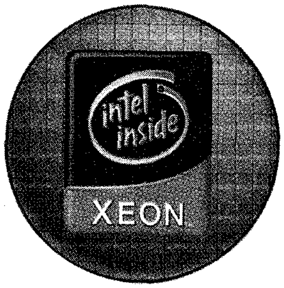

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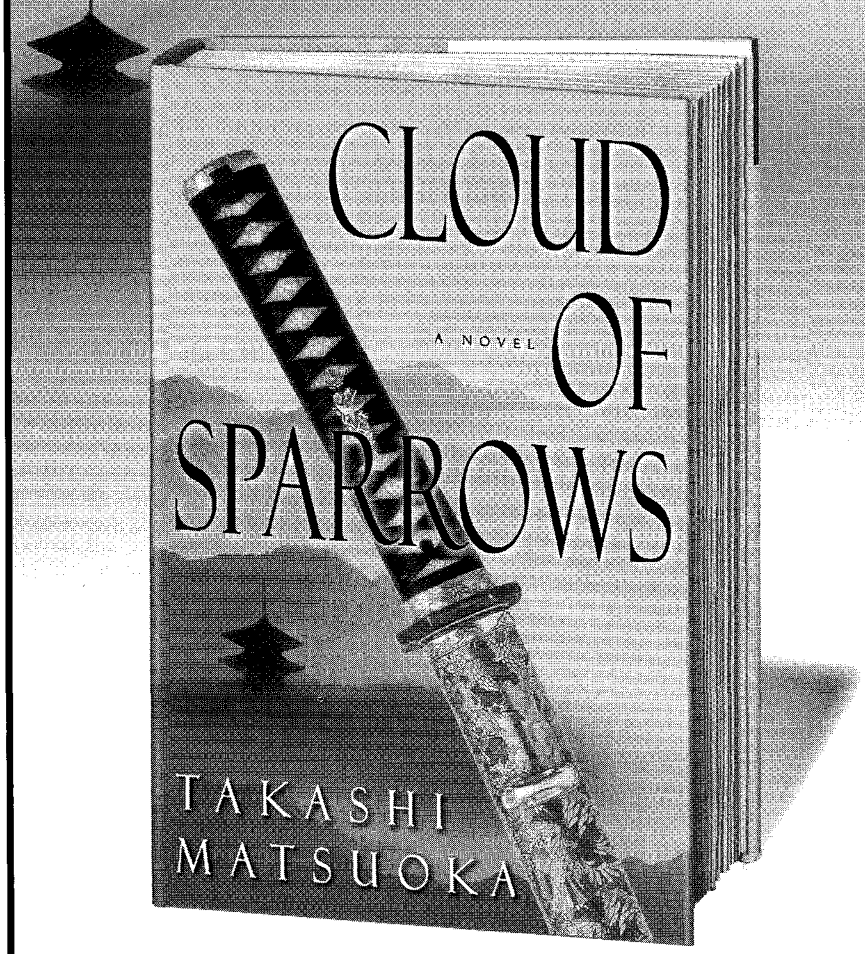

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Chinese and summoning Eshu, the Yoruban trickster god, to guide the characters to their doom. The season also features earlier works by Ruiz and a new dance by Ann Reinking called "Slices," set to music by Santana and Philip Hamilton. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Dec. 4-6 at 8, Dec. 7 at 2 and 8, Dec. 8 at 2 and 7:30, and Dec. 10 at 8. Through Dec. 15.)

"ANTIGONE: THE TIN CAN TIED TO HER OWN DAMN TAIL"
It seems almost accidental that Mac Wellman's distillation of "Antigone" has anything to do with the Sophocles tragedy. Directed by Big Dance Theatre's Paul Lazar and Annie-B Parson, the show begins with four actresses who play chattering girls fixated on flimsy props: a Wal-mart crown, a toy gun, a pile of clothes. But then the clothes morph into Polynices' corpse, and the gun is used to arrest Antigone. "The play grabs hold of their ankles," Lazar says. "They push it off, but it grabs them at the thigh, then at the trunk." It grabs the audience, too. This stealthy work uses a dance logic of quick, resonant transition to travel from silliness to elegy. Rebecca Wisocky plays a grouchy and perplexed Creon; Didi O'Connell's Antigone is a quiet, world-weary mystery. Dec. 5-7 at 7 and Dec. 8 at 2. Continues through Dec. 22. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077.)

IMPROVISATION FESTIVAL/NY
The two-week festival of performances, classes, and workshops, now in its eleventh year, was curated by the dancer Amanda Loulaki and features Sarah Michelson, Bebe Miller, Miguel Gutierrez, Andrew Harwood, and other rising artists. Through Dec. 15. (Events occur at seven downtown locations; call 598-0551 for complete schedule and address information.)

YEU MATCHUC
In their first New York appearance, these dancer-drummer-healers from Guasave, Sinaloa, a rural Indian town in northwestern Mexico, present abbreviated versions of their twenty-four-hour ceremonial dances. In a dance ritual meant for Easter, eleven men don fierce, hairy masks, incarnating a local species of Holy Ghost. They pound on drums and shake their legs, which rattle with decorative leggings made of seed-filled butterfly cocoons. In a solo celebrating a day in the life of a deer, a dancer wearing a taxidermied deer head mimics deerlike activities with uncanny accuracy: nibbling at brush, freezing at impending danger, and bounding away. (National Museum of the American Indian, 1 Bowling Green. 514-3700. Dec. 6-8 at 1.)

"THE BOTTOMLAND"
In a strangely fertile, hybrid performance, Doug Varone's dancers create a fable of backwoods America, set in and around Kentucky's Mammoth Caves. As a stage-size screen shows the dancers, dressed in Depression-era clothing, moving amid damp, dark cave walls, the actual dancers appear, reënacting or complementing their screen stories. The first act introduces the players, and is accompanied by Patty Loveless's country plaints. The second act, set to new music by Gaétan Leboeuf, shows conflicts arising among them. The dancers move with fluidity and submission, falling to the ground emphatically and rising again renewed—as in the myth of Antaeus, who had to reconnect with his mother, the Earth, to regain strength. Geography, Varone shows, is their trap, and their refuge. The entire company is exceptional, but two members, Natalie Desch and Daniel Charon, show special grace and muscularity. Dec. 5-6 at 8, Dec. 7 at 7:30 and 10, Dec. 8 at 4 and 7, and Dec. 10 at 8. Through Dec. 22. (Ohio, 66 Wooster St. 279-4200.)

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

BEN FOLDS
Owing more to show tunes and seventies singer-songwriters than to the alternative-rock scene that spawned him, Folds is perhaps best known for his ballad about teen-age abortion, "Brick," a plangent hit that catapulted his guitarless, piano-based band,

POP NOTES

MOPPING UP

When George Harrison died, late last year, of cancer, he left behind a body of work more frustrating than that of any other Beatle. John was spotty, Paul often fatuous, and Ringo only got by with a little help from his friends. But Harrison, the group's third songwriter (and thus the one with the most to gain from a Beatles breakup), arrived thunderously as a solo artist with the sublime "All Things Must Pass," in 1970, and then, for most of the next three decades, did little to live up to its promise. Nostalgia may polish albums like "Living in the Material World" and "Thirty-Three and a Third," but clarity punishes them; weakly written and weakly sung, they seem more concerned with the world's corruption and Harrison's own court battles than with carrying the torch for rock and roll. **"Brainwashed"** (EMI), a collection of Harrison's final recordings, is better than anyone had any reason to expect. Working from homemade demos (recorded mostly with the drummer Jim Keltner), Harrison's son, Dhani, and self-appointed fifth Beatle Jeff Lynne have created a graceful, generous record that moves from pithy statements of Eastern philosophy (the opener, "Any Road") through shivery instrumentals ("Marwa Blues"). "Looking For My Life" and "Never Get Over You" are affectingly simple, with Harrison recharging his faith after serious challenges to his health and his love life, respectively. Only the title track descends into the kind of carping jeremiad that dominated Harrison's second-rate seventies records, although it does so with significantly more sonic punch.

The two surviving Beatles also have new albums in stores: live records, as it were. Paul McCartney's **"Back in the U.S."** (Capitol) is the very definition of redundancy, his sixth concert recording and the fourth since 1990, but it far outclasses limp documents like "Tripping the Live Fantastic" or "Paul Is Live." There is a memorial ambiance to the shows, which include tributes to George and John, as well as to McCartney's late wife, Linda, but life trumps death as a crack band of mostly younger players tears through FM staples like "Jet" and "Coming Up," as well as Beatles classics, and even lesser efforts like the ham-fisted September 11th anthem "Freedom." McCartney's voice is marvellous throughout, as much a part of rock and roll as Elvis's or Little Richard's. **"The King Biscuit Flower Hour Presents Ringo Starr & His All-Starr Band"** (Razor & Tie) is a souvenir of last year's installment of his never-ending road show, in which the always amiable drummer assembles a farcically eclectic set of rock veterans—this edition includes Ian Hunter, Greg Lake, Sheila E., and Howard Jones—and hits the road. Like Ringo himself, the album is fun but hardly essential.

—*Ben Greenman*

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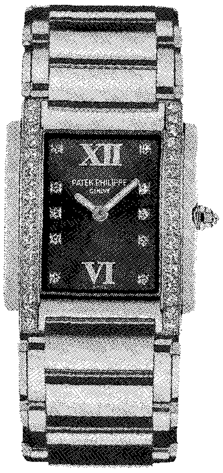
the Ben Folds Five (actually a trio), into the limelight in the late nineties. Folds, who never fit snugly into rotation next to angst-ridden guitar bands, has since shed the band and stripped the act down to simply himself and his piano, although his music remains as earnest and cheeky as ever. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Dec. 4 at 8.)

GUNS N' ROSES

The original gang of whiskey-swiggin' cutthroats that once reigned over all things rock has become what might be more aptly called the Axl Rose Eccentricity Revue. The new Guns features a gaggle of fresh recruits, including the guitarist Buckethead (who sports a KFC bucket on his noggin) and former members of the Replacements and Nine Inch Nails. Purists might balk at the absence of Slash, Duff, Izzy, and the rest of the original gang, but the mere fact that Rose has come out of his self-imposed exile

PATEK PHILIPPE
GENEVE



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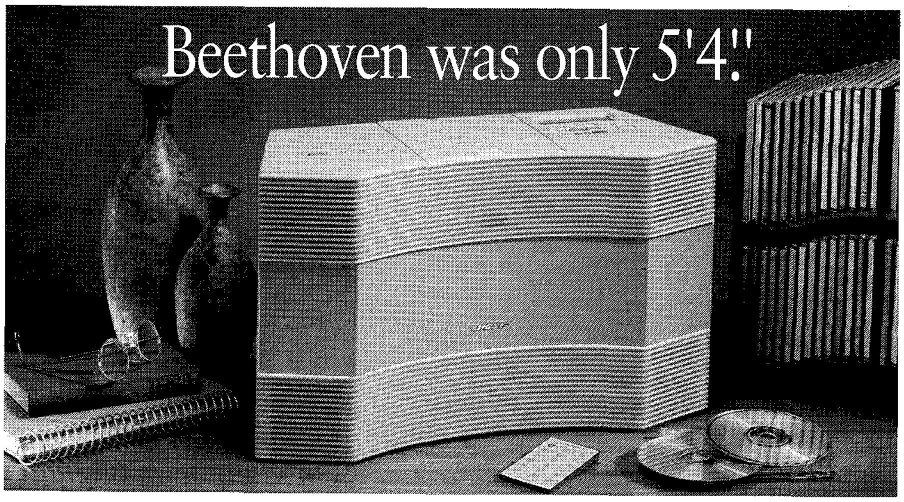

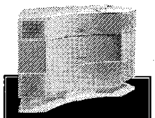

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(amid rumors of baldness and plastic surgery) should be reason enough to do a serpentine hip shake. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Dec. 5 at 7:30.)

AIMEE MANN
The former 'Til Tuesday singer, whose music helped brighten the film "Magnolia," stops by with her angst-ridden tunes and knotty wordplay. (Beacon Theatre. Dec. 6 at 8.)

LOOSE FUR
Maybe there's something in Chicago's water. This group from the Windy City, the result of late-night collaborations between the Wilco vets Jeff Tweedy and Glen Kotche and the respected producer Jim O'Rourke, twists and slouches its way through a small repertoire of Dada-esque soundscapes with such songs as "Laminated Cat," "Elegant Transaction," and "Chinese Apple." (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-858-2424. Dec. 6-7 at 8.)

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Dec. 6 at 8: **Wu Man**, a classical pi-pa player of luminous virtuosity who counts Yo-Yo Ma and the Kronos Quartet among her collaborators, performs music from China, Macedonia, and Ukraine. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) Dec. 7 at 8: The **Romeiko Ensemble** brings the exotic sounds of Byzantine chant and Ottoman classical music to town. (St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 51st St.) (For more information about both concerts, call 545-7536.)

"SOUL CALL"
Soul jazz, routinely dismissed since its late-fifties heyday, simply refuses to die. And why should it? Such practitioners as the vibraphonist **Roy Ayers**, the saxophonists **Lou Donaldson** and **David (Fathead) Newman**, and the men of the **Masters of Groove**, including the drummer **Bernard (Pretty) Purdie**, routinely bring an audience to near-ecstasy with their funky blues-based jazz excursions. This exceptional lineup, arranged by Jazz at Lincoln Center, has the potential to rock this house like it's never been rocked before. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Dec. 6-7 at 8.)

DIKKI DU AND THE ZYDECO CREW
A night of top-shelf song and dance from southwestern Louisiana. (La Belle Époque, 827 Broadway, at 13th St. For more information, call 685-7597. Dec. 8 at 7:30.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Dec. 6: **El Vez**, the "Mexican Elvis," hosts his Christmas party. Dec. 7: Despite their gritty home town and a name that suggests a switchblade-wielding street gang, the **Detroit Cobras** are a garage band with versatility and a sense of history. They incorporate classic R. & B., soul, and vintage pop in their music, all the while still rocking furiously.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Dec. 6-8: The cultural archeologists in **Loser's Lounge** dig through the back catalogue of Simon and Garfunkel. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Dec. 5: The **Wallflowers.** Jakob Dylan continues his growth as a mainstream rocker with the Wallflowers' latest release, "Red Letter Days." Dec. 6-7: The erstwhile Black Crowes front man **Chris Robinson.**

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Dec. 10: Though **MC Paul Barman's** comic bona fides are well established, his fans would be the first to admit that reading his raps can be preferable to hearing him perform them. Nonetheless, his début LP, "Paullelujah!," which is full of his trademark quirky sounds and high-pitched rapping (which might make fans of mainstream hip-hop cringe), solidifies his reputation as an innovator. He defiantly asks his detractors, "Had I made a mockery of a culture like the Choco Taco? / Was I to rap as France was to Morocco?"

LUNA LOUNGE
171 Ludlow St. (260-2323)—Dec. 6: The fiery New York City ensemble **Grupo Fiesta** churns out pan-Latin percussion-driven grooves as Cecilia Villar's extended guitar solos build on the legacy of Carlos Santana. The group is celebrating the release of its self-titled début collection of forward-looking rock *en español.*

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Dec. 7: The **Future Bible Heroes** rely on eighties-style synthesizers and the lyrics of Stephin Merritt, whose aching-hearted and wry-voiced songs are fast becoming part of the urban pop canon. Claudia Gonson, Merritt's cohort in the Magnetic Fields, handles the vocals and manages to sound nearly as sophisticated as the songwriter himself.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg (718-599-5103)—Dec. 6: The local heroes in **Longwave** weave a broad sonic tapestry with their guitars, expanding on the new-rock terrain staked out by the likes of the Strokes and the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. Dec. 7: The **Heroine Sheiks,** the raucous and wildly fun homespun combo led by the unpredictably antic singer Shannon Selberg (who occasionally blows a bugle).

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

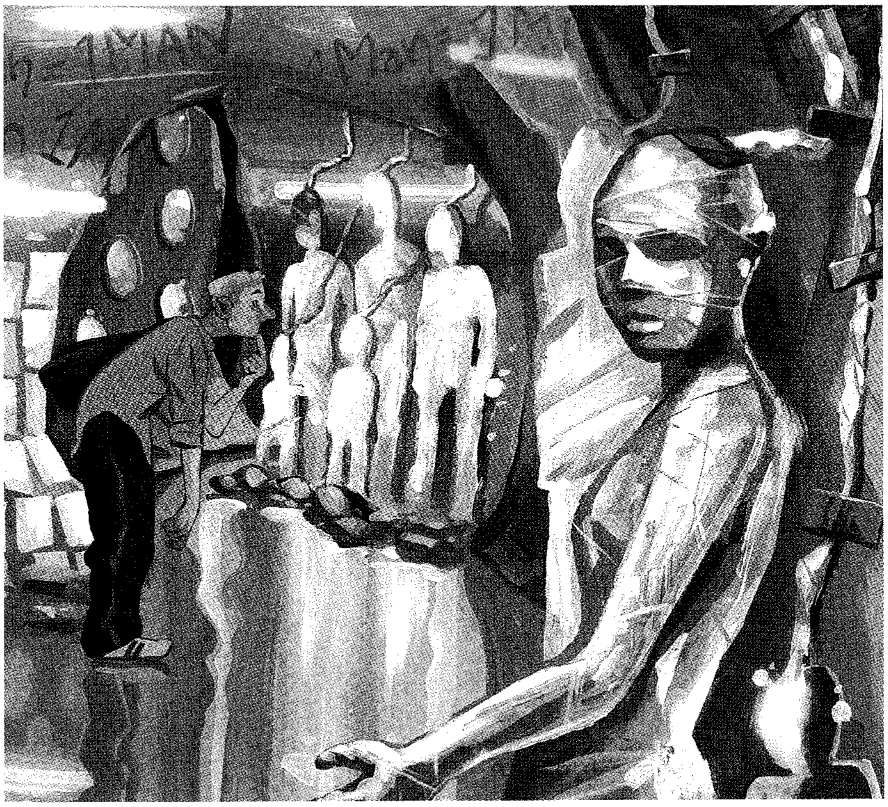
BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—**Lee Ritenour,** a smooth-jazz guitarist with a superior technique and an unabashed love for Wes Montgomery, leaves the West Coast behind for a visit through Dec. 8.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and the magisterially puckish **Bobby Short** and his mini big band. Ever the showman, Short delivers a choice slate of Depression-era show tunes with boundless enthusiasm, his trademark razor-sharp timing, a broad smile, and animated eyebrows. He may be a paragon of sophistication, but the high point of the show comes from lower precincts as he closes with a resounding rendition of Wesley (Sox) Wilson's party anthem, made famous by Bessie Smith, "Gimme a Pigfoot." ♦ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, the **Loston Harris** trio is in attendance.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (582-2121)—Through Dec. 8: The funk will fly at this minifestival of the Hammond B3 organ featuring two keyboard masters, **Dr. Lonnie Smith** and **Jimmy McGriff,** along with such fellow-travellers as the saxophonist **Houston Person** and the guitarist **Melvin Sparks.** Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Palmetto Records, one of those intrepid little jazz independents, brings in the cream of its roster this week. The pianist and composer **Andrew Hill,** an ageless iconoclast enjoying a late career resurgence, starts things off with a quartet on Dec. 3. He returns with a sextet on Dec. 6, following two talented upstart pianists, **David Berkman** (Dec. 4) and **Orrin Evans** (Dec. 5). Closing the week is a pair of stirring, if undervalued, ensembles: the trumpeter **Ray Vega's Latin Jazz Sextet** (Dec. 7) and the pianist **Bill Mays** and his trio (Dec. 8).

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Dec. 8: In the early nineties, stardom seemed imminent for the pianist **Geri Allen,** but



7 RMS NO VU *The Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn, today's best-loved installationist and an eternal student, has built a warren of fluorescent-lit cardboard caves lined with packing tape and stocked with books of philosophy and politics, videos of cave drawings, posters of rock (get it?) stars, and a populace of mannequins and cutout figures wrapped in aluminum foil. The spaces are pleasantly ugly, and the mood is grave. "Cavemanman," at Gladstone, is a place in which to gestate world-saving ideas or to go squirrelly trying.—Peter Schjeldahl*

ZOHAR LAZAR

THE GULF WAR, 1991.

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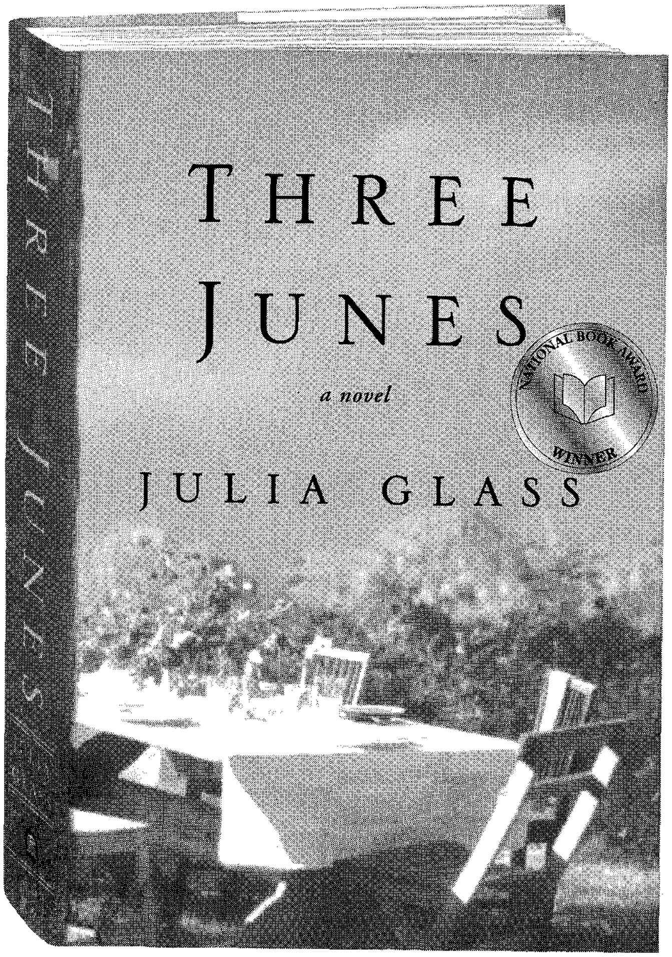

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she's had a bumpy ride since then. Nonetheless, this gifted if still unfocussed artist remains a gripping and expressive improviser; for proof, hear her on Charles Lloyd's recent release "Lift Every Voice." Her trio includes the bassist **Buster Williams** and the drummer **Billy Hart**. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—When Winston Churchill said, "Let us brace ourselves to our duties," he may not have meant "Let us tighten the corset in our pink organza gown." But in the years leading up to the Second World War, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were doing just that, leading a life of extravagant frivolity across the English Channel in Paris. **"Blithe Spirit: The Windsor Set"** presents French couture, including fashions by Lanvin, Chanel, and Schiaparelli, created for British café society between 1935 and 1940. Most of the clothes are nothing more than beautifully tailored evening wear, but certain designers manage to slip a little subversiveness into their creations, as in the Mainbocher dress that portends impending chaos through layers of faded and shredded tulle and lace. Through Feb. 9. ♦ Tucked away in a gallery at the back of the museum's Lehman Wing is a collection of thirty-five small-scale Impressionist and post-Impressionist paintings from the private collection of the late phil-

TABLES FOR TWO

JEWEL BAKO
239 E. 5th St. (979-1012)—Most sushi joints don't offer timbale of toro tartare, glazed with avocado sauce and decorated with a cucumber-and-radish cockade like some petit four out of Escoffier. But Grace and Jack Lamb, who on their first date both confessed to dreams of owning a restaurant, aren't interested in restraint. "I wanted bamboo and elegant, sexy lighting," he says. "I wanted it to feel luxurious and warm, like a jewel box," she says. Eighteen months ago, they opened their tiny Japanese grotto on the site of a former video shop on East Fifth Street. "We're here every night," Mr. Lamb, formerly of Bouley and Danube, says. "It's our baby."

The couple hired the Japanese architect Hiromi Tsuruta, who painted the concrete outer wall the color of morels and cut it with a low strip of glass. Inside the cool hideaway, a curving tunnel of bamboo rods casts a green, watery light over the room, and gray velvet banquettes hug the walls. Mr. Lamb, an Irish-Italian-American in a dark suit and designer frames, and Mrs. Lamb, a Korean-American in sleeveless silks, move among the patrons. As she stops to explain a special or he stoops to pour a bit of *ume shu* (rice vodka flavored with Yamaguchi plums), his hand grazes her forearm, her hand brushes his shoulder.

In the back of the restaurant at the sushi bar, chef Masato Shimizu sculpts fish into still-lifes: an amuse-bouche of wild surf clams, lightly poached, arrives on a bed of chrysanthemum petals. Tasmanian-salmon sashimi, pin-striped with fine yellow lines, appears on a ceramic palette. Strips of belt fish lie on a julienne of daikon radish that tastes of hearts of palm. The Lambs' pleasure shows all over the menu, but nowhere more than in their playful selection of sakes—from the ladylike Cherry Blossom Water and the Very Gentle Genshu to the Devil's Quivering Tongue, which, it turns out, tastes like ouzo. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for dinner. Sushi à la carte $3-$12; entrées $24-$100.)

—*Liesl Schillinger*

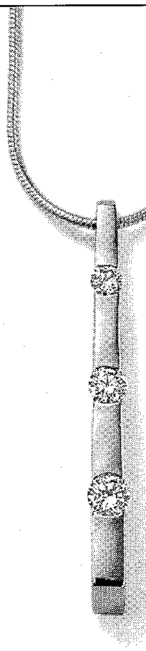
anthropist Janice Levin. There are guaranteed crowd-pleasers—Monet's garden at Argenteuil, Renoir's zaftig bather, Bonnard's alfresco lunch, Morisot's rosy-cheeked nymphs—and also some surprises. A pre-Moulin Rouge Toulouse-Lautrec depicts a day trip to the countryside with his portrait of three friends lounging in high grass as a little dog looks on from a slight distance (a surrogate for the artist himself?). Through Feb. 9. ♦ **"The Prints of Vija Celmins."** Through Dec. 29. ♦ **"Richard Avedon: Portraits."** Through Jan. 5. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART (MOMA QNS)
33rd St. at Queens Blvd., Long Island City (708-9480)—**"Drawing Now: Eight Propositions,"** a trailblazing show curated by Laura Hoptman, sets the MOMA seal of approval on twenty-six youngish international artists working in the medium that's been the bedrock of visual art since Lascaux. Hoptman's "propositions" identify current modes of drawing, including illustration, decoration, fashion, architectural and scientific drafting, and comics. The show suggests a forge of styles, in which artists hammer out new links between craft, discipline, and worldly import. Some—John Currin, Elizabeth Peyton, Neo Rauch, Ugo Rondinone—are farther along than others, but nearly all convey the exhilaration of being onto something. For the first time in quite a while at a museum group show, exacting comparison, argument, and judgment seem to be a matter of course. Don't miss this. Through Jan. 6. ♦ **"The Changing of the Avant-Garde: Visionary Architectural Drawings from the Howard Gilman Collection."** Through Jan. 6. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 10 to 5, and Friday evenings until 7:45.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—In one projection in **"Going Forth by Day,"** Bill Viola's visually striking five-channel video piece commissioned by a German bank for the Guggenheim Berlin, an eclectic procession traipses through a light-dappled forest (the panoramic image evokes old-fashioned CinemaScope). In an adjacent scene, water gushes from the windows and doors of a pristine building façade. Death and resurrection figure elsewhere in the action, as Viola tackles Big Themes. Through Jan. 12. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Although Gee's Bend, Alabama, is isolated by poverty and a sharp bend in the Alabama River, the group of hamlets there has for generations fostered quilt-making as a virtuoso performance in frugality. Sixty hand-sewn quilts, dating from the thirties to the present and incorporating a wild variety of geometries, colors, and fabrics, are on view. Though the women of the African-American community—many of them members of the local Pettway clan—quilt and sing together (a documentary film showing continuously in the gallery broadcasts the sewing circles' amazing harmonies), no two quilts are alike. Each woman has a fiercely individual approach. The visual compositions are electric with abstraction of the most visceral sort, aesthetically inventive and born of necessity. Through March 2. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6; Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Exposed: The Victorian Nude,"** from Tate Britain, is a strong historical show about an era when jumpiness about sex had bizarre effects in art. Literary and classical themes provided the alibis for displaying naked females. Popular guises included Shakespearean fairies, virtuous heroines (Lady Godiva rides again, and again), Roman decadents, and the like. For male nakedness, the excuse was propaganda for robust healthiness. Lust lurked, and smut reigned. A turn toward frankness around the turn of the century—in the gloomy nudes of Walter Sickert and the too little known William Orpen—offers a fresh invention: actual people. Orpen's felicitously titled "The English Nude" (1900), a Rembrandtesque tour de force, presents a regular, interesting woman on a rumpled bed. Its mystery is that of a really lived life. Through Jan. 5. ♦ Judy Chicago's monu-



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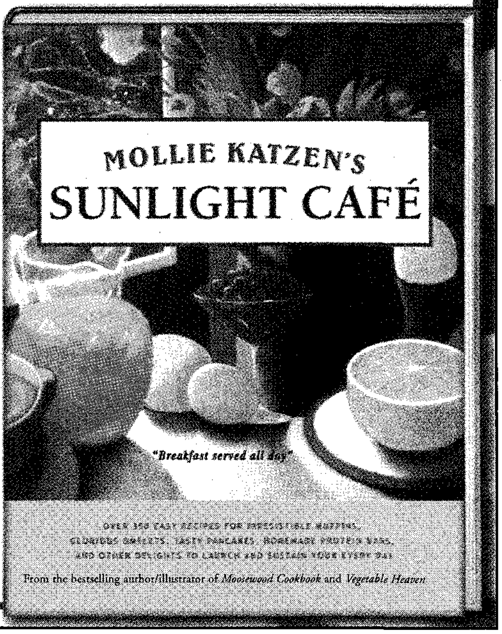
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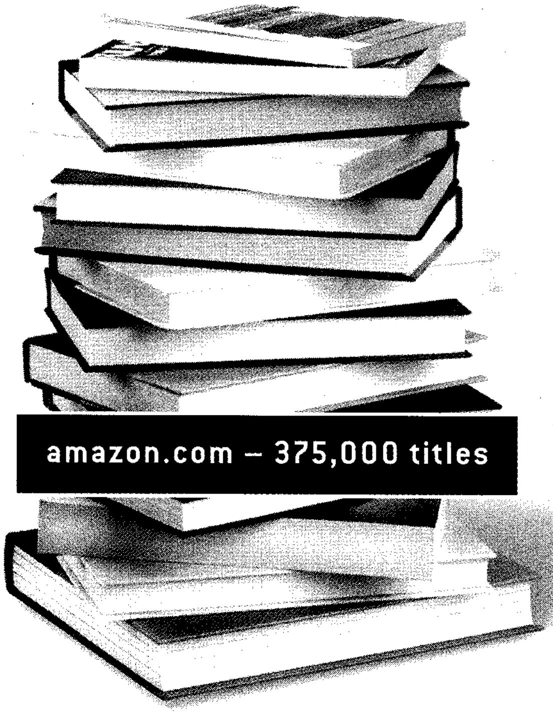

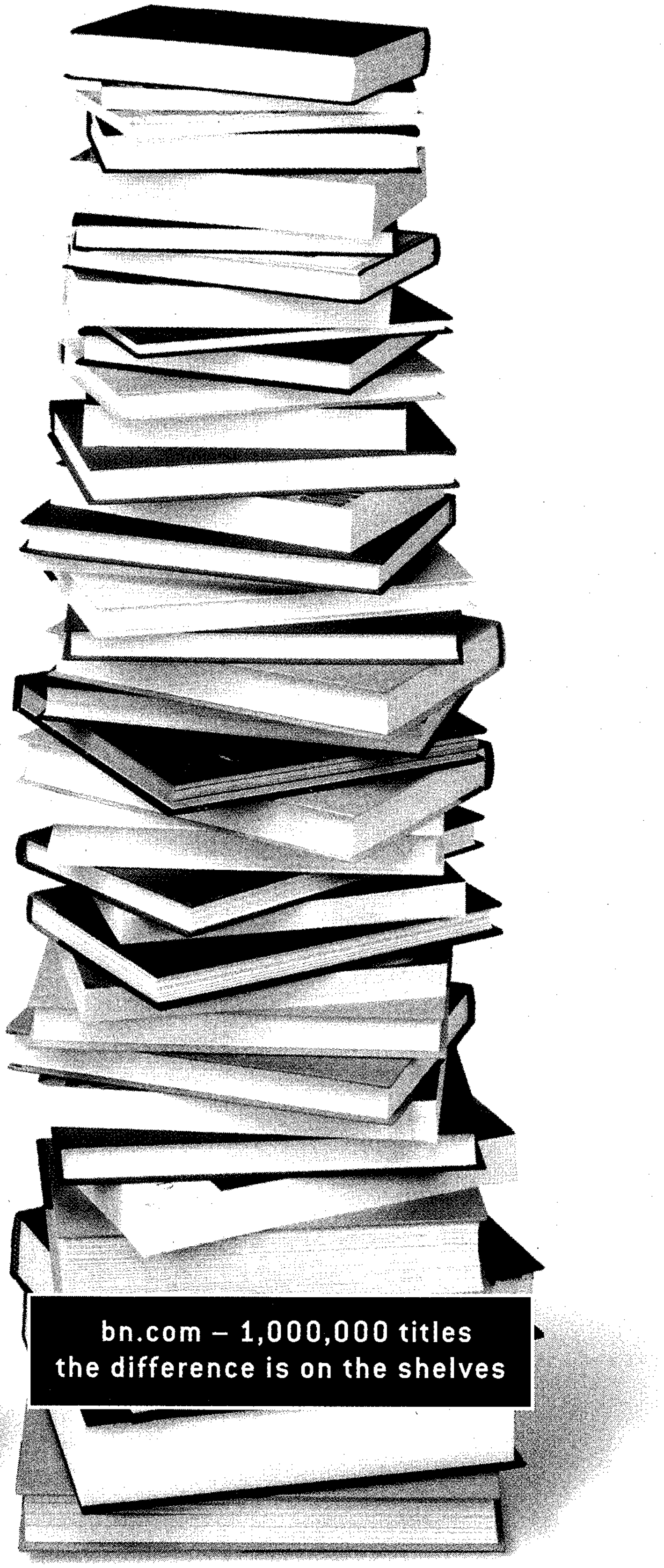
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mental installation **“The Dinner Party”** is a delta-shaped banquet table for thirty-nine worthies, from Primordial Goddess to Georgia O’Keeffe. Through Feb. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

SCHOMBERG CENTER

Malcolm X Blvd. at 135th St. (491-2200)—**“The Art of African Women: Empowering Traditions.”** For the past twenty years, the Namibian-born photographer Margaret Courtney-Clarke has gone around South, West, and North Africa documenting decorative painting and craft techniques practiced by female artisans. In certain rural areas of Ghana, Mali, and Burkina Faso, women paint their houses, inside and out, with ravishingly colored geometries, some passed down for generations and others invented on the spot. Their beadwork and weavings, like the textiles and pottery of North African Berber women, trace dynamic interactions between traditional and innovative techniques, organic and synthetic materials. The exhibition, which combines the didactic and the celebratory, is best when it focusses on individual artists, notably the Ndebele artists and activists Francina and Angelina Ndimande, of Mabhoko, South Africa, a mother and daughter who have established a community-service project to preserve indigenous techniques while providing support to the women who practice them. Through March 30. (Open Mondays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 1 to 5.)

“Mr. Makovicka’s Wings, Prague, 1972,” by Miroslav Hucek, at Leica (see Photography).

GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

WILLIAM KENTRIDGE

This haunting show is inspired by the 1923 novel “Confessions of Zeno,” by Italo Svevo, a writer who has been called Italy’s answer to Kafka. In this series, Kentridge’s signature charcoal drawings—larger ones hung salon-style around the room and smaller ones displayed in a vitrine—suggest a dreamlike Mitteleuropa of wrought-iron balustrades, lonely civic monuments, and zaftig nudes. The smaller works are made on red-ruled leaves culled from a nineteenth-century business ledger, with entries in a neat clerk’s hand overlaid by Kentridge’s smoky, darkly comic scenes; similar red lines, added to the big drawings, take on psychological implications. Kentridge has also relied on Svevo for a new film, “Zeno Writing.” The eleven-minute animated opera, based on the drawings, is cinematic chocolate: bittersweet, absolutely satisfying, and over too soon. Through Jan. 4. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.)

Short List

ANTHONY CARO

Mitchell-Inness & Nash, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 744-7400. Through Dec. 20.

PETER DOIG

Werner, 4 E. 77th St. 988-1623. Through Jan. 18.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

RICHARD LONG / ROXY PAINE / MAGNUS WALLIN

The James Cohan gallery inaugurates its new Chelsea space with a garden of earthly delights. Long, the most established and earnest of the three artists, makes art out of treks in nature. Here, he fills the floor with an oval of black and white stones from Mexico and Vermont, accompanied by a drippy mural made of mud (it looks like an eco-friendly Pat Steir). In adjacent galleries, Paine mounts his hyperrealistic mushrooms on stark white panels to create a hybrid of sculpture and painting (call it pop mycology), and Wallin lines the walls of a mirrored chamber with a futuristic animation starring characters from Hieronymous Bosch. Through Dec. 21. (533 W. 26th St. 755-7171.)

TOM SACHS

Bad boy makes good in this impressive inaugural project made with foam core, Sharpie pens, and lots of hot glue for the Bohen Foundation’s new space in Chelsea. In the past, Sachs has courted controversy, briefly landing his dealer in jail for doling out live ammo (in a bowl, in lieu of candy), or building a model death camp out of Prada packaging. While his latest installation, “Nutsy’s,” does include a model ghetto that comes with its own sniper station, the centerpiece is a pair of maquettes Sachs calls McBusier, pairing Le Corbusier’s mass-housing project built in Marseilles in 1952 with McDonald’s. Through spring. (415 W. 13th St. 414-4575.)

Short List

THOMAS HIRSCHHORN

Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.
Through Dec. 21.

GUILLERMO KUITCA / WOLFGANG LAIB

Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 999-7337.
Through Dec. 15.

ALEXI WORTH

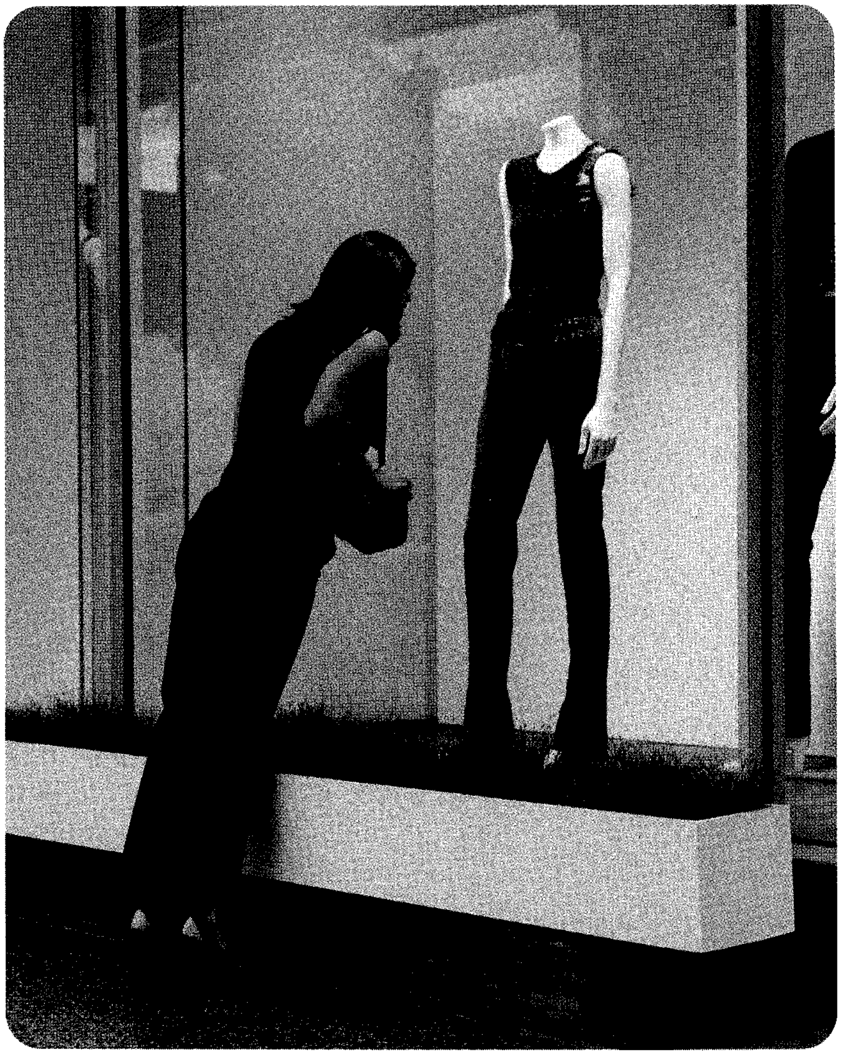
Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318.
Through Dec. 21.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

LISA RUYTER

Pictures of hipsters partying the night away are nothing new, but Ruyter stakes out fresh territory in eye-popping paintings based on her own snap-

Funny how something
without a head can call
your name so loudly.



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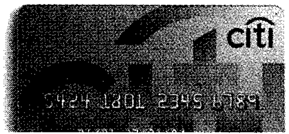

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shots. She exploits the distortions of flash in her imagery so that Martini glasses psychedelically dapple and faces blush acid yellow (and you thought red eyes were bad news). Ruyter typically limits herself to less than ten colors per canvas, but her palette is so intense and unexpected that the range feels limitless. Through Jan. 4. (Koenig, 249 Centre St. 334-9255.)

"SANS"
This ambitious exhibition-and-performance series (which could also be called "Avec") changes daily. On Tuesdays, the Tribeca space turns into Café Apex, a drop-in center for recovering artaholics, providing coffee, cookies, and magazines; on other days, they promise film and video screenings, a photography show, sound performances, lectures, and spontaneous one-day installations. Participating artists and curators include the videographer Matthew Buckingham, Mary Ceruti of the Sculpture Center, the curator Carin Kuoni, the painter Mira Schor, and the critic Gregory Williams, along with current participants in the international studio-residency program sponsored by the gallery. Through Dec. 21. (Apex Art, 291 Church St. 431-5270. For daily listings, visit www.apexart.org.)

Short List

CÉSAR PATERNOSTO AND CECILIA VICUÑA
The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 219-2166.
Through Dec. 20.

GALLERIES–BROOKLYN

JOHN J. O'CONNOR AND JOHAN NOBELL
Different as they are, both of these two small shows—drawings by O'Connor and paintings by Nobell—conjure the ghost of Rube Goldberg. O'Connor's starbursts and diagrams in colored pencil outline such elaborate, fantastically interlocked phenomena as memory loss and the patterns on a Rubik's Cube; the best one proposes a correlation between U.S. military engagements and recent earthquakes on the North American continent. In Nobell's tightly controlled but cartoonish paintings, hills and trees, fences and woodpiles coalesce into awkwardly pyrotechnic contraptions—machine guns? moonshine stills?—as if nature itself had gone ballistic. Through Dec. 23. (Pierogi, 177 N. 9th St. 718-599-2144.)

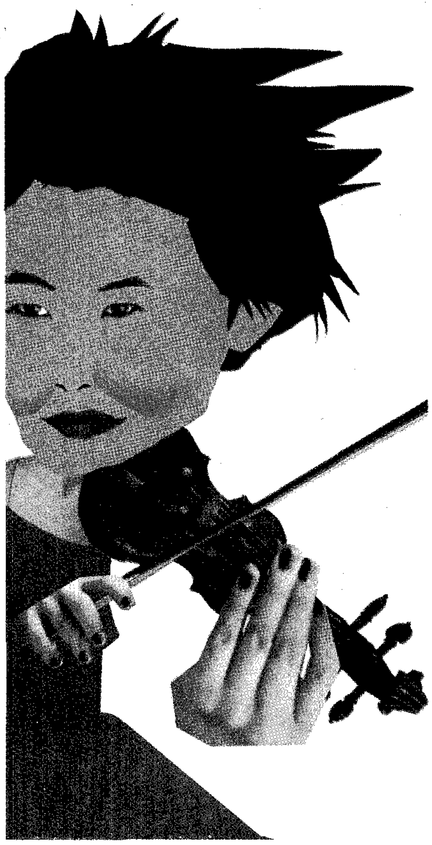
ANALIA SEGAL
What if the walls really did have ears—or even more provocative body parts? In her New York début, the Argentinean artist seamlessly affixes small, plump folds of white-painted plaster to the pristine gallery walls so that the severe architecture softens into a continuous, almost embarrassingly sensual surface. The fleshy protrusions invite touch, and their edges have acquired a slight polish like the parts of statues that pilgrims stroke for luck. Segal makes staid wallboard palpitate, suggesting that just behind its bland façade some vivid force is breathing, listening, inviting entry. Through Dec. 22. (Plus Ultra, 235 S. 1st St. 718-387-3844.)

"DRAWING QUIRKS 2"
This group show earns its title, though quirkiness (like its quieter cousin, charm) can come across as cloying and affected, or refreshing and almost innocent, depending on your mood. Michael Rogers, Stephen Bitterolf, and Tim Spelios make it into the refreshing category, especially Rogers, whose persnickety pencil drawings of suburban interiors are spangled with elaborate decorative patterns, as if someone were building an Orientalist seraglio in his basement in Peoria. Bitterolf's Photo-Realist charcoal drawings of grass and leaves invite pleasant double-takes, and Spelios's mandala of generic clip art achieves a goofy elegance. Don't skip Rogers's road-trip video in the back gallery, which, while it isn't a drawing, describes a seeming single line that shoots from Coney Island to Santa Monica in the space of twenty minutes. Through Dec. 16. (Parker's Box, 193 Grand St. 718-388-2882.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

DAN ESTABROOK
Although he uses two of the earliest techniques for creating a photographic image on paper—calotype negatives and salt-print positives—Estabrook's work has a thoroughly contemporary appeal. By appropriating imagery, as well as processes, from the eighteen-forties, he creates a form of instantaneous nostalgia. In one unique paper negative made this year, a woman turns her back to the camera; her Laura Ingalls Wilder-style braid is added in pencil, which gives a level of detail impossible without the artful sleight of hand. The "Little Devils" series—tiny, three-quarter portraits in which pencilled-in dots buzz around the sitters' faces—conjures up the photographs of "ghosts" so popular in the nineteenth century. Through Jan. 11. (Morthland, 511 W. 25th St. 242-7767.)

DAVID KATZENSTEIN
Through his use of a Brownie camera—the boxy, fixed-lens plaything popular in the nineteen-fifties—Katzenstein has released himself from the technical demands of contemporary photographers. Because he can only point and shoot (no focussing allowed), the supersaturated color images have a vitality (and blurriness) that's more travelogue than social criticism. Katzenstein's pictures were taken in the nineteen-eighties in developing countries, and he extracts from the local colors a painterly effect—a Peruvian girl's face smiles across the frame, her reed-thatched village just coming into focus several feet behind her—which melds a sense of joy with the sensibility of Bonnard. Through Dec. 18. (In Camera, 511 W. 25th St. 647-7667.)



The violinist Jennifer Koh plays at Miller Theatre on December 5.

STEPHEN KRONINGER

"CZECH DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY"
The gallery overflows with more than a hundred and twenty images by almost forty photographers and offers a crash course in the rich history of Czech photography. The exhibition opens with turn-of-the-century works by well-known photographers such as Frantisek Drtikol, proceeds to the mid-century with surrealistic reportage by Vaclav Chochola, and culminates with images by contemporary artists like Antonin Kratochvil and Viktor Kolar. Though all of the pictures are documentary in nature, many have a feel that is more Robert Frank than Robert Capa. For instance, Miroslav Hucek's image of an elderly First World War veteran shows a slight bespectacled man standing on a Prague rooftop while stoically wearing wings of his own design. Through Dec. 14. (Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051.)

Short List

ABELARDO MORELL
Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766.
Through Dec. 7.

GABRIEL OROZCO
Through Jan. 4. (Marian Goodman,
24 W. 57th St. 977-7160.)

TOM WOOD
Erben, 516 W. 20th St. 645-8701.
Through Dec. 21.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
Dec. 4 at 10:15 A.M.: Part I of a major sale of American paintings, drawings, and sculpture. It begins with twenty-one works from the collection of the renowned dealer Arthur G. Altschul, including paintings by such artists as Shinn, Sloan ("Gray and Brass," estimated to sell for approximately three million dollars), Glackens, and Homer; the rest of the sale features notable works by Cassatt, Prendergast, Dewing ("The Song," one of his iconic garden scenes), Chase, and O'Keeffe. ♦ Dec. 4 at 2: The final session of the sale, including works by Rockwell, Raphaelle Peale, and the Wyeths, along with a substantial offering of Western art by Remington, Bierstadt, Alfred Jacob Miller ("The Buffalo Hunt"), and others. ♦ Dec. 5 at 10:15 A.M.: Sporting art, including works by John Frederick Herring and Sir Alfred Munnings. ♦ Dec. 6 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: Furniture, silver, and decorative art works from the twentieth century, including a broad selection of Tiffany glass. ♦ Dec. 10 at 10:15 A.M. and 2: An auction of jewelry. A pair of diamond pendant earrings once owned by Eva Perón, and frequently worn by her, closes the sale. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
Dec. 5 at 10 A.M.: American paintings. ♦ Dec. 5 at 2 and Dec. 6 at 10 A.M.: Fine jewels. ♦ Dec. 6 at noon: Four hundred and eighty lots of watches and wristwatches, including many from the firm of Patek Philippe (such as a rare stainless-steel chronograph wristwatch, circa 1938). ♦ Dec. 10 at 10 A.M.: Furniture and decorative art works from the twentieth century, including items in the Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco styles. One of six known pianos by Jacques-Emile Ruhlmann (a baby grand crafted in ebony, amboyna, ivory, and bronze), with works by Gaveau, is a highlight of the sale. ♦ Dec. 10 at 2: Lamps, glass, and decorative objects from the Tiffany studios. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.)

PHILLIPS
Dec. 9 at 10:30 A.M. and 2:30: "Jewels," a two-part sale. (3 W. 57th St. 940-1200.)

DOYLE
Dec. 4 at 10 A.M.: Furniture, decorations, and paintings, along with a selection of prints, porcelain, silver, and rugs. ♦ Dec. 10 at 1: American and European art. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.)

SWANN
Dec. 5 at 10:30 A.M.: Photographic books. A copy of William Henry Fox Talbot's "Some Account of the Art of Photogenic Drawing" from 1839, the first published book devoted exclusively to photography (expected to bring up to fifty thousand dollars), is the highlight of the sale. ♦ Dec. 5 at 2:30: Photographs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

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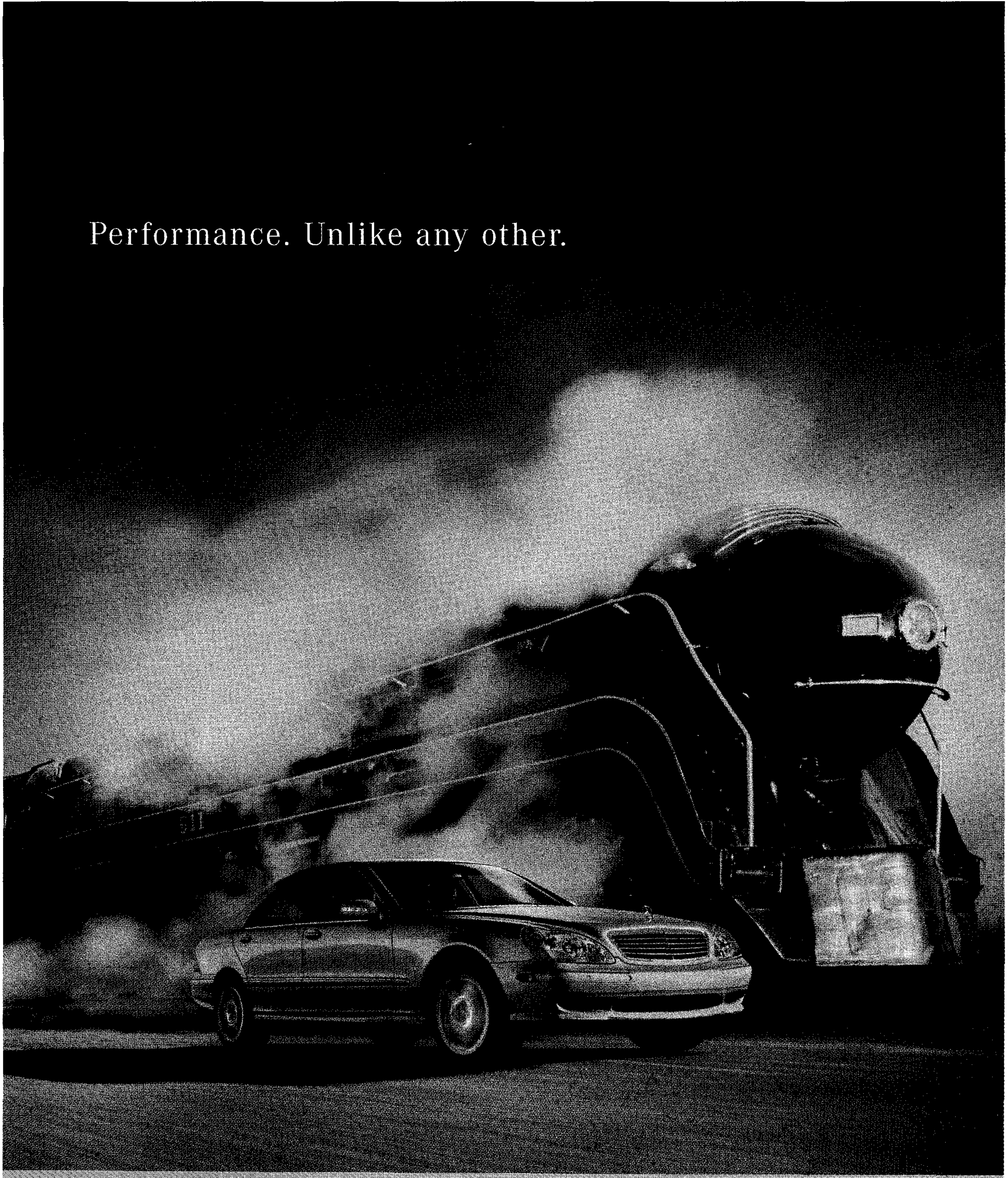
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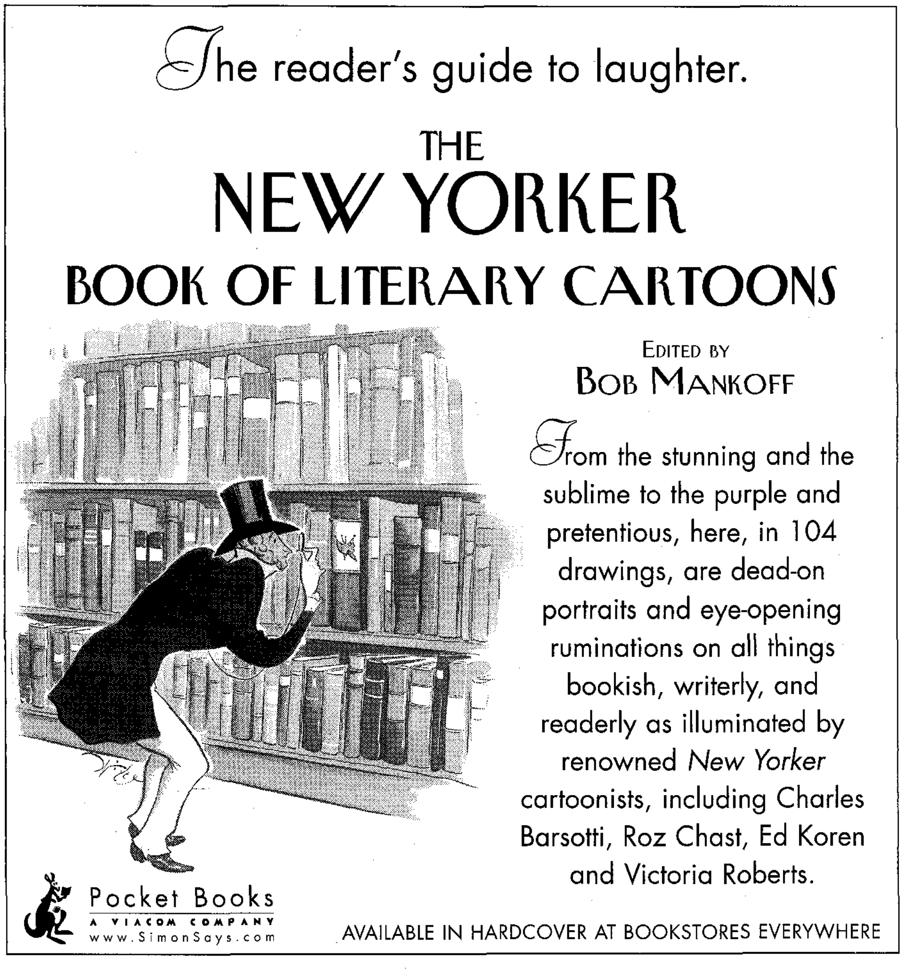
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METROPOLITAN OPERA
"Il Trovatore," with Sondra Radvanovsky, Elena Zaremba, Franco Farina, Carlos Alvarez, and Rosendo Flores; Frédéric Chaslin conducts. (Dec. 4 and Dec. 7 at 8.) ♦ William Bolcom may have received great notices for his opera **"A View from the Bridge,"** but this always productive composer has added two new solos for the opera's Met début, the first performances anywhere since its première at Lyric Opera of Chicago (which commissioned it), in 1999. The libretto is by Arnold Weinstein—Bolcom's collaborator for forty years—and Arthur Miller, based on Miller's play. Frank Galati, making his house début, directs a cast that includes Catherine Malfitano, Gregory Turay, and Kim Josephson (all of whom are repeating their Chicago roles), along with Isabel Bayrakdarian (a début), Richard Bernstein, and John Del Carlo; the conductor is Dennis Russell Davies, a longtime advocate of Bolcom's music. (Dec. 5 and Dec. 9 at 8.) ♦ **"Lucia di Lammermoor,"** with Annick Massis (a début), Jianyi Zhang, and Anthony Michaels-Moore; Patrick Summers. (Dec. 6 at 8.) ♦ With Marcelo Álvarez replacing Zhang. (Dec. 10 at 8.) ♦ **"Fidelio,"** Beethoven's happy symphony of freedom and justice, gets a reality check in this revival of the Met's 2000 production. Taking this prison drama out of eighteenth-century Spain and dropping it into what seems like a modern banana republic doesn't do the piece any harm, though by the end the cruel realism of Jürgen Flimm's staging may seem, for some, a little remote from what the composer actually wanted to say. But the cast—which includes Waltraud Meier, Hei-Kyung Hong, Johan Botha, Richard Paul Fink, and Matti Salminen—is top drawer, and Peter Schneider's leadership of the orchestra brings out the score's gentleness as well as its power. (Dec. 7 at 1:30. This is the final performance.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

DICAPO OPERA THEATRE: PUCCINI'S "EDGAR"
The maestro tinkered for years with this, his second opera, after its unsuccessful 1889 première. Its stop-and-go plot—an elaborate, and eventually bloody, lovers' quarrel set in fourteenth-century Flanders—may be bizarre, but the music's dark and elevated tone looks forward to "Turandot." According to Dicapo, these are the work's first staged performances in America. The conductor is Louis Salemno; Michael Capasso directs. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 288-9438. Dec. 6-7 at 8 and Dec. 8 at 4. Through Dec. 15.)

AMATO OPERA
The feisty little opera house, an East Village treasure, presents Rossini's **"Barber of Seville,"** directed and conducted by Anthony Amato. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. Dec. 7 at 7:30 and Dec. 8 at 2:30. Through Jan. 5.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC

NEW AMSTERDAM SINGERS: "SING NOEL"
Clara Longstreth conducts the group—considered the city's leading amateur choir—in a diverse program of sacred music by such composers as Bach, Billings, Tallis, and Britten ("A Ceremony of Carols," with the harpist Susan Jolles), along with the world première of "The Ballad of Barnaby," by Alla Borzova, a Russian-American composer with a gift for mischief. (Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Central Park W. at 65th St. Dec. 6 at 8. ♦ Immanuel Lutheran Church, Lexington Ave. at 88th St. Dec. 8 at 4, with carolling and refreshments to follow. Tickets at the door.)

EOS ORCHESTRA
Jonathan Sheffer, never one to tread the beaten path, conducts the ensemble (with chorus) in a modern adaptation of Schütz's oratorio "The Birth of Jesus Christ," rescored for marimbas and strings. Corelli's "Christmas Concerto" will also be performed, untouched. (Medieval Sculp-

ture Hall, Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 570-3949. Dec. 8 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

CHORAL SYMPHONY SOCIETY
The voices of the society, joined by those of the New York Cantata Singers, perform Bach's "Christmas Oratorio," in its splendid entirety, for the eleventh year in a row. David Labovitz conducts. (Christ and St. Stephen's Church, 120 W. 69th St. Dec. 8 at 7. Tickets at the door.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
In his second week of concerts, Christoph von Dohnányi, a conductor with keen programming instincts, offers a fresh take on three repertory works, placing Bartók's Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta in between Ives's mysterious "Unanswered Question" and the Beethoven Violin Concerto (performed by Christian Tetzlaff, making his début, who plays his transcriptions of the cadenzas Beethoven wrote when he transformed the piece into a piano concerto). (Dec. 4-5 at 7:30 and Dec. 6 at 2.) ♦ Lorin Maazel leads the Philharmonic's hundred-and-sixtieth-birthday concert, conducting music from its first concert program: Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, along with the Overture and an aria, "Ozean, du Ungeheuer," from Weber's "Oberon." The special guest is Deborah Voigt, who will also sing an aria from Beethoven's "Fidelio" ("Abscheulicher!"), as well as the composer's concert aria "Ah! Perfido." (Dec. 7 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5656.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S
Donald Runnicles conducts a program of Mendelssohn, Mozart (the "Jupiter" Symphony), and Berlioz ("Les Nuits d'Été," with the mezzo-soprano Susan Graham). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Dec. 5 at 8.)

RECITALS

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: GUARNERI STRING QUARTET
Performing a concert of Beethoven, Brahms (the Quartet in B-Flat Major, Op. 67), and Mendelssohn. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5788. Dec. 4 at 8.)

MILLER THEATRE: "NEW YORK HARDCORE"
Jennifer Koh's violin playing is more than good enough to earn the respect of the establishment (she's a winner of the Tchaikovsky Competition and of the Avery Fisher grant), but she's also a musician who likes to live on the edge. She performs a program of music by five of Gotham's most formidable composers: Carter, Reich, Zorn (a première), Wuorinen, and the jazz master Ornette Coleman. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Dec. 5 at 8.)

ROCK HOTEL PIANOFEST
The street-smart new series, heading into its final weeks, offers a stellar lineup of diverse artists. Dec. 4 at 8: Christopher Taylor, rapidly taking his place as a pianist-intellectual in the tradition of Oppens, Rosen, and Taub, plays Messiaen's complete "Vingt Regards sur L'Enfant Jésus"—a herculean feat. (Angel Orensanz Center, 172 Norfolk St.) ♦ Dec. 5 at 8: The Australian pianist Roger Woodward, a renowned new-music player for three decades, offers a program of Debussy, Feldman, Takemitsu ("For Away," which was written for him), and others. (Society Hall, Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St.) ♦ Dec. 6 at 8: Oxana Yablonskaya, an avatar of the Russian bravura style, plays music by Rachmaninoff (the "Corelli Variations"), Beethoven, and others. (Society Hall). ♦ Dec. 7 at 8: Frederic Rzewski, at once an indomitable renegade of American music and an estimable figure in the grand European tradition of composer-pianists, teams up with one of his great disciples—Ursula Oppens—for a program of Carter, Wolff, Vierk, Schoenberg (the Second Chamber Symphony, arranged for two pianos), and, of course, Rzewski (including "The Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues"). Eric Huebner, an up-and-comer on New York's

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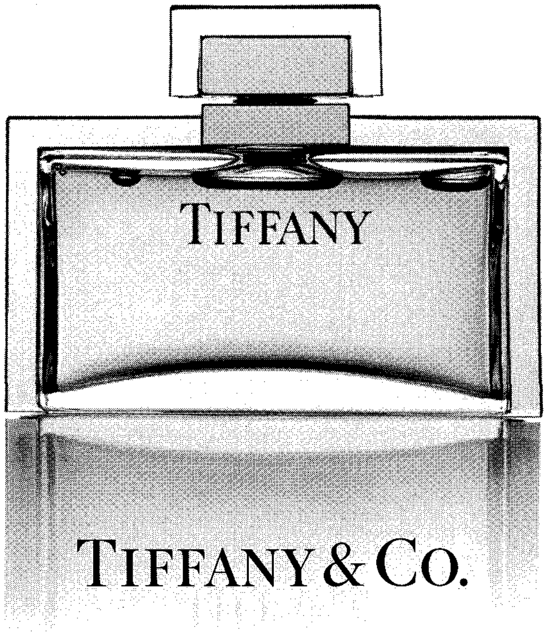

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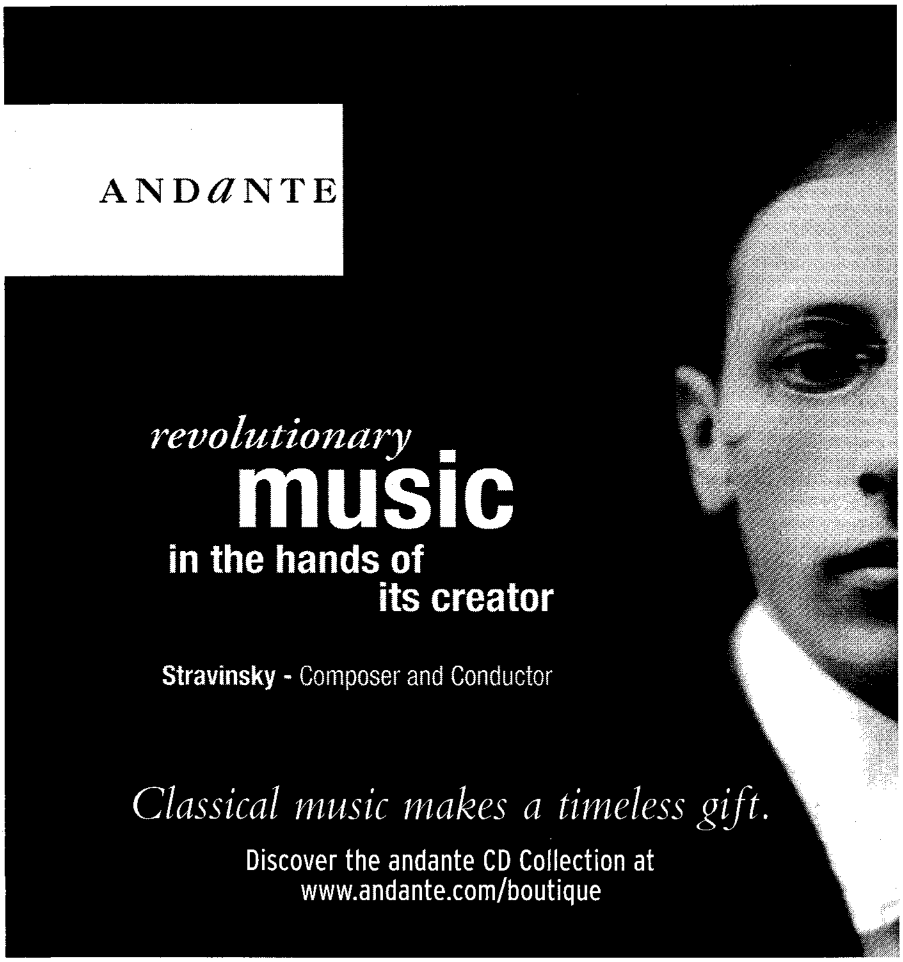

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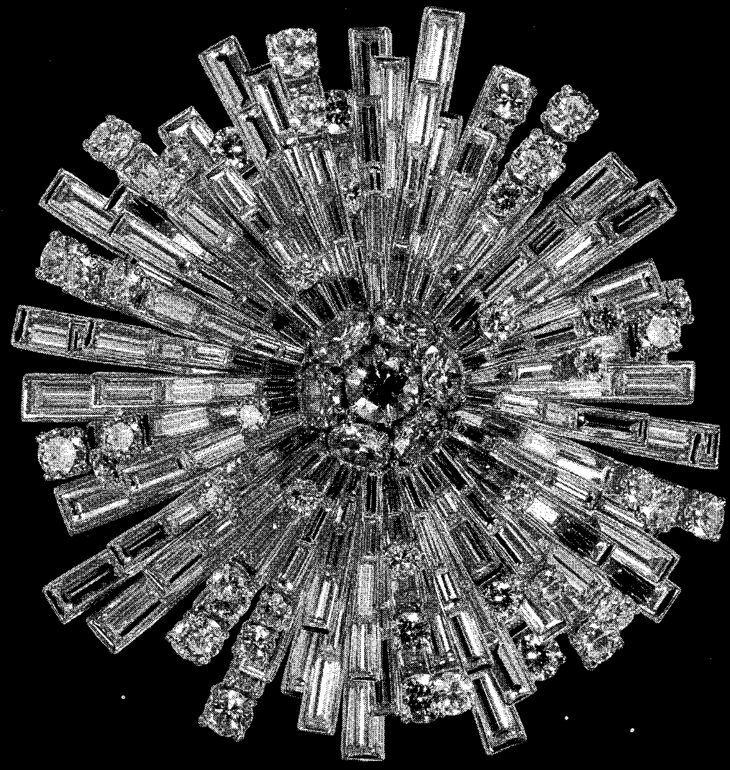

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new-music scene, opens for them. (Society Hall.) (For tickets to all concerts, call 307-4100.)

BARGEMUSIC
I Virtuosi Italiani, seventeen strings strong, packs the barge to perform a weekend of (mostly) Italian music. Dec. 5-6 at 7:30: Vivaldi's complete "Four Seasons," along with a string-orchestra performance of Verdi's Quartet. ♦ Dec. 7 at 7:30 and Dec. 8 at 4: String-orchestra works by Rota, Wolf-Ferrari, Mendelssohn, and Mozart (the Sinfonia Concertante, with the local favorites Mark Peskanov, on violin, and Toby Hoffman, on viola). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

KITCHEN HOUSE BLEND
The venue's eclectic new-music band (including the pianist Kathleen Supové) plays premières by Roy Campbell, Tiyé Giraud, and Evan Ziporyn. (512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. Dec. 6-7 at 8.)

GERALD FINLEY
The Canadian baritone, with the pianist Julius Drake, offers an enterprising program of Vaughan Williams, Britten (a rare performance of "Songs and Proverbs of William Blake," a gritty, triste cycle written for Fischer-Dieskau), Duparc, Barber, Coward, and others. (Alice Tully Hall. 721-6500. Dec. 8 at 5.)

TODD REYNOLDS: "NUOVE UOVA"
"New Eggs," a typically unfettered program from the impetuous violinist (and his assemblage of electronic gear), featuring premières by six of downtown's musical heavy hitters (including David Lang, Ingram Marshall, and Phil Kline). (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Dec. 9 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

BOWERY POETRY CLUB
Bob Holman, a guru of the progressive-poetry scene and once one of the forces behind the enduring Lower East Side temple of literary hipness called the Nuyorican Poets Café, as well as a producer of the 1996 PBS series "The United States of Poetry," can often be found at the front door of his sparkling new performance space and bar, which opened earlier this fall. He's the one with a leather "Dragnet" hat on his head, talking about "the participatory future of art." On Thursday nights, the future arrives—at least the part of it that is lustful, heartbroken, and pissed off at the system—during Urbana, a weekly event in which, Holman says, "poetry becomes blood sport." The show's female m.c. informs the audience that they're in the right place if they "like cute nerds with issues," and commands them to "always love the poet, no matter what!" On other nights, the club programs everything from hip-hop jam bands to readings of Persian poetry, given entirely in Farsi and sounding like musical truths from the beginning of the world. (308 Bowery. 614-0505. For more information, visit www.bowerypoetry.com.)

MORE READINGS
Dec. 4 at 8: The Poetry Project presents Joel Lewis and Douglas Rothschild. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ The literary journal *McSweeney's* commandeers the Williamsburg night club Galapagos for two evenings of music, art, and mischief. Dec. 5 features Thurston Moore, Jonathan Ames, and the band One Ring Zero. Dec. 7 belongs to Komar & Melamid, Art Spiegelman, Ian Frazier, and the band Hazmat Modine, among others. (70 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. 718-782-5188. Both events start at 7.) ♦ Dec. 7 at 4: The poets Martine Bellen and Rosmarie Waldrop read from their verse. (Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ Dec. 9 at 7:30: Caroline Knox and Matthew Zapruder read from their poetry. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS
Dec. 5 at 7: The poet Alice Notley offers a lecture with a timely title, "Homer and the Postmodern War." (Poets House, 72 Spring St. 431-7920.) ♦ Dec. 8 at 7:30: Leonard Lopate interviews the novelist Pat Conroy. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 415-5500.) ♦ Dec. 10 at 7: The animator Bill Plympton screens and discusses a selection of his work, including the Academy Award-nominated short "Your Face." (Parsons School of Design, 66 Fifth Ave. No tickets necessary.)

BOOK CURRENTS

They, Robots

In 1739, the French inventor Jacques de Vaucanson unveiled his latest startling creation: an anatomically convincing, yet wholly mechanical, duck—one that quacked, ate grain, and, most impressively, excreted. Vaucanson's mechanical duck was a sensation, and, as Rodney A. Brooks relates in his engaging **FLESH AND MACHINES: HOW ROBOTS WILL CHANGE US** (Pantheon), one of the celebrated early attempts to replicate—or, at least, imitate—life. Brooks, who showed up in the Errol Morris documentary "Fast, Cheap, and Out of Control," directs the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at M.I.T., and "Flesh and Machines" tells the odd history—from that Enlightenment duck to Deep Blue, a computer program that famously beat Garry Kasparov at chess—of what he calls "mankind's centuries-long quest to build artificial creatures." Recently, Brooks oversaw the development of Kismet, "the world's first robot that is truly sociable, that can interact with people on an equal basis." (Kismet has outsized eyeballs and fuzzy brows and sometimes gets lonely.) But what if, like Hal in "2001: A Space Odyssey," the sentient machines take over? Brooks argues that this can never happen, since, very soon, all of us "will become a merger between flesh and machines."

RICHARD MC GUIRE

It will be decades before hobbyists can build their own Kismets at home. But, as "technogeek bot builder" William Gurstelle makes clear in **BUILDING BOTS** (Chicago Review), it's easy to whip up simpler, angrier creatures—say, a sledgehammer-wielding thwack-bot. In this handy how-to guide for turning your garage into a robot war zone (think mechanical gamecocks), Gurstelle examines the growing popularity of "combat robotics," a sport that he predicts could soon "grow into another NASCAR."

—*Mark Rozzo*

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Sindukht Becoming Aware of Rudaba's Actions, page from the Great Mongol *Shahnama* (Book of Kings), 1330s, Iran (probably Tabriz), Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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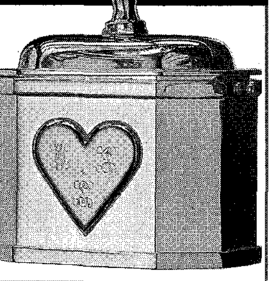

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MOVIES OPENING

ADAPTATION
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 6.

ANALYZE THAT
A mob boss (Robert De Niro) is released from jail into the custody of his therapist (Billy Crystal), in this sequel to the 1999 comedy. With Lisa Kudrow. Directed by Harold Ramis. Opening Dec. 6.

BLACKBOARDS
Samira Makhmalbaf ("The Apple") directed this drama in which a group of displaced teachers roam the Iran-Iraq border in search of students. In Kurdish. Opening Dec. 6. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

EMPIRE
In a thriller written and directed by Franc Reyes, a South Bronx drug dealer (John Leguizamo) tries to go straight by partnering with an investment banker (Peter Sarsgaard). With Fat Joe, Denise Richards, and Isabella Rossellini. Opening Dec. 6.

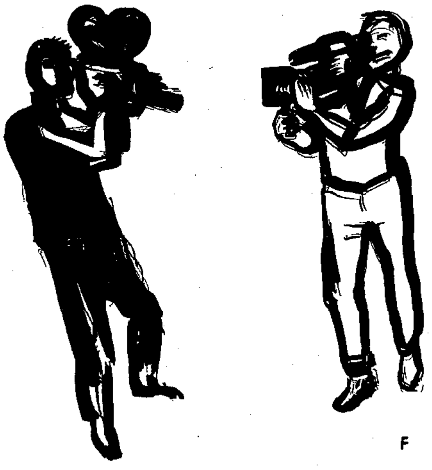
EQUILIBRIUM
Christian Bale plays a rogue government agent in a world where all emotions are suppressed by mind-altering drugs. Kurt Wimmer wrote and directed. Opening Dec. 6.

MASSOUD, THE AFGHAN
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening Dec. 4. (Film Forum.)

FILM NOTES

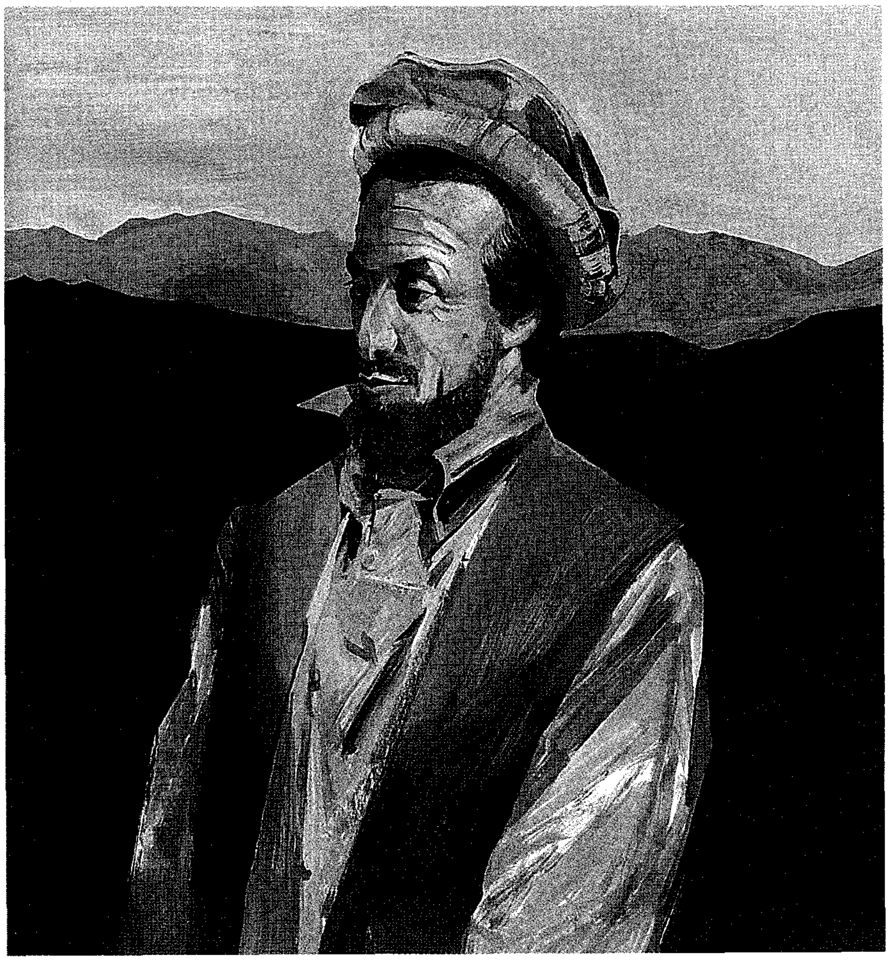
ARARAT
A complicated, not to say confusing, movie from Atom Egoyan. His subject is the massacre of the Armenians in 1915—a matter of abiding pain and significance to those of Armenian descent, such as the director himself. He approaches the problem from different angles: there is a historical epic film, then the story of how that epic itself was cast and shot, then a delving into the lives of its performers, and so forth. There is even a long, implausible interview between a customs inspector (Christopher Plummer) and a young Armenian (David Alpay) who has just arrived in Canada; as the subplots ramify, we watch the effect of the genocide—as it is unequivocally called by its victims—on lives both close and distant. The trouble is that you can feel the history being used as much as examined; what is required, not least for American audiences, is an unerring clarity, and what they get is a stylish, near-numbing deadpan of mystification. With Bruce Greenwood and Charles Aznavour, who gives every sign of being immortal.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/18/02.) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

BOXCAR BERTHA
Martin Scorsese was in his blessedly brief American Primitive phase when he directed this 1972 Roger Corman exploitation movie. It follows the Corman formula: remake a hit on the cheap (in this case, "Bonnie and Clyde"), use editing to provide an illusion of speed and movement and to disguise the skimpy production, and make the lead characters at least semi-likable. A free-spirited teen-age gal (Barbara Hershey) sees her crop-dusting dad fatally crash-land. Two railroad workers (David Carradine and Bernie Casey) beat the bejesus out of a rich man and a driver for coercing the father to fly in a faulty plane. From the beginning, the movie puts us in the late-sixties/early-seventies version of the Depression. It draws party lines so clearly that when this trio and a gambling man (Barry Primus) become a rail-heist mob, they do it first out of desperation and then for their own version of the Cause. Hershey, at the peak of her flower-child phase, falls out of her gowns and flashes come-hither smiles at the universe; Carradine, focussed and cagey, warms up for playing Woody Guthrie in "Bound for Glory." Scorsese turns in a cameo as a whorehouse john, but he leaves his biggest mark on the material by ending this film with a crucifixion.—*Michael Sragow* (Gramercy Theatre; Dec. 7 and Dec. 9.)

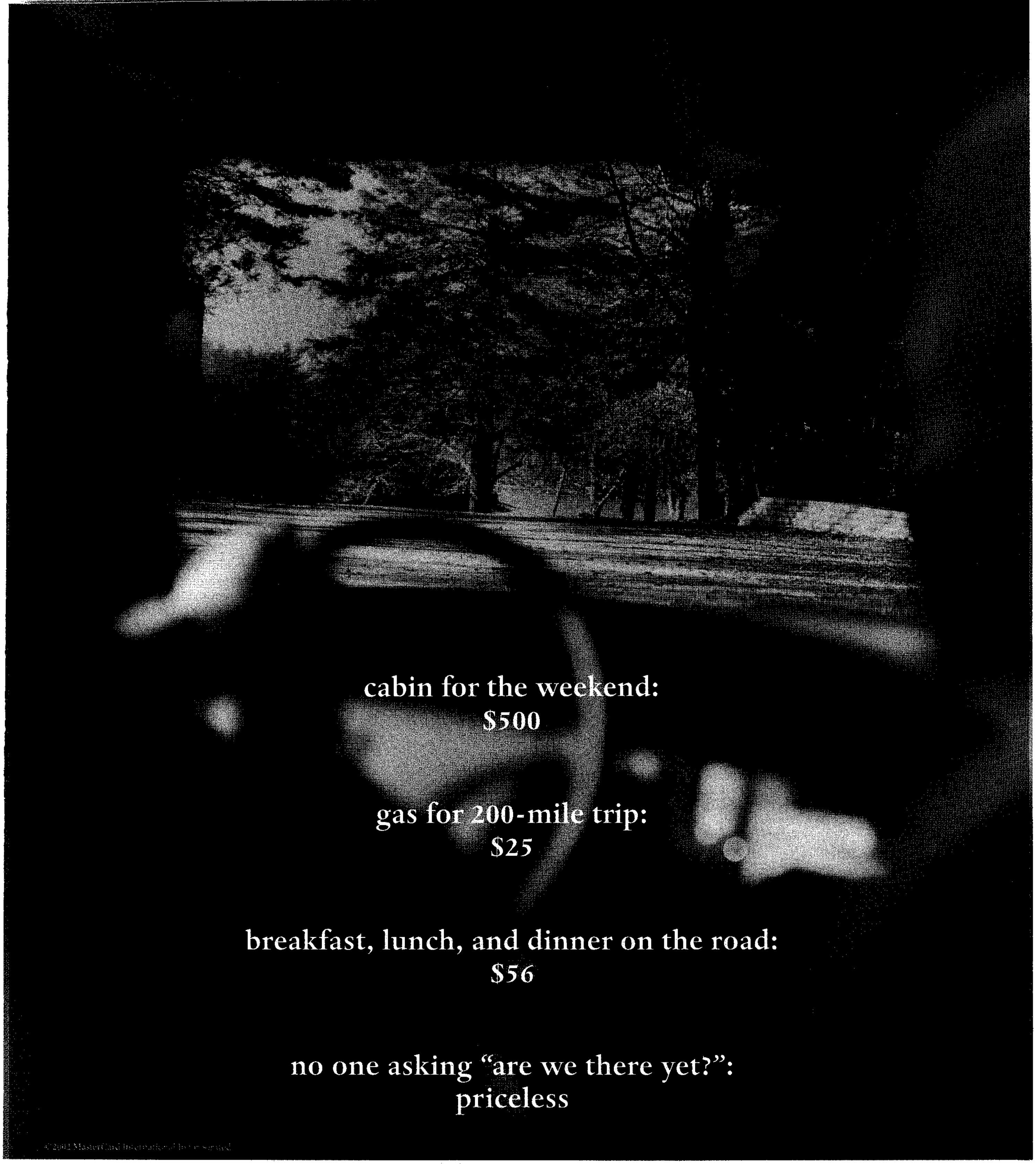


EL CRIMEN DEL PADRE AMARO
When the Catholic authorities in Mexico got wind of this movie, which tells of the affair between a young priest and a sixteen-year-old virgin, they threatened to excommunicate its two young stars. Bad move. A curious and aroused public turned out in droves to see exactly how Father Amaro (Gael García Bernal) and Amelia (Ana Claudia Talancón) would go about breaking the Seventh Commandment. To be sure, there's a fair amount of steamy sacrilege, but it's not quite the last tango the trailer would lead you to expect. The director, Carlos Carrera, turns out to be a man of serious intent, portraying the Catholic church as a fallible institution, inextricably linked, for better or worse, to all levels of Mexican society. This is shown mostly through the compromised life of an older priest, Father Benito (played, with dignity, by the veteran actor Sancho Gracia), who has a mistress and a cozy relationship with the local drug lord. The story's many strands require a deft touch, and not surprisingly the movie gets away from Carrera; the second half devolves into soap-opera plotting and scenes transparently designed for maximum shock value. In Spanish.—*Michael Agger* (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and Eastside Playhouse.)

DIE ANOTHER DAY
James Bond's twentieth cinematic adventure, the fourth with the redoubtable Pierce Brosnan in the lead, gets off to an unsettling start. The pre-credit sequence sees Bond captured by the North Korean military, imprisoned, and tortured. (By the time he's set free, he bears an unfortunate resemblance to John Walker Lindh.) Many believe Bond gave away valuable information under torture, and the movie picks up speed when a revenge-seeking 007 teams up with an American agent nicknamed Jinx (Halle Berry) to clear his name. The usual irresistible Bond-film kicks are on full display, but the teaming of Brosnan and Berry never heats up—he's effortlessly in character, she's all eye candy. Her acting seems very tentative; it helps when she doesn't have to deliver a line. She does, however, have a classic Bond moment—a sexy lifting of her eyebrow before a backward dive off a cliff. The action scenes play well, the high point being a fencing duel between Bond and his nemesis, although a scene with Bond surfing an ice-strewn tsunami is a regrettable bust. Lee Tamahori keeps the film's style squarely in the range of past, personality-free Bond epics. Perhaps the most that can be said of this entertainment—in the innuendo-drenched parlance of the franchise—is that it's well tooled.—*Bruce Diones* (Astor Plaza, Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)


RICCARDO VECCHIO

Opening December 4, "Massoud, the Afghan."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EARTH

The specific subject is collectivization, but Dovzhenko's 1930 masterwork is a passionate lyric on the continuity of man, death, and nature. The theme is perhaps most startlingly expressed in a sequence about a man who has just celebrated the arrival of a tractor. He starts to dance—for sheer love of life—on his way home, and as he dances in the middle of the moonlit road he is suddenly struck by a bullet. Silent.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Dec. 5.)

8 MILE

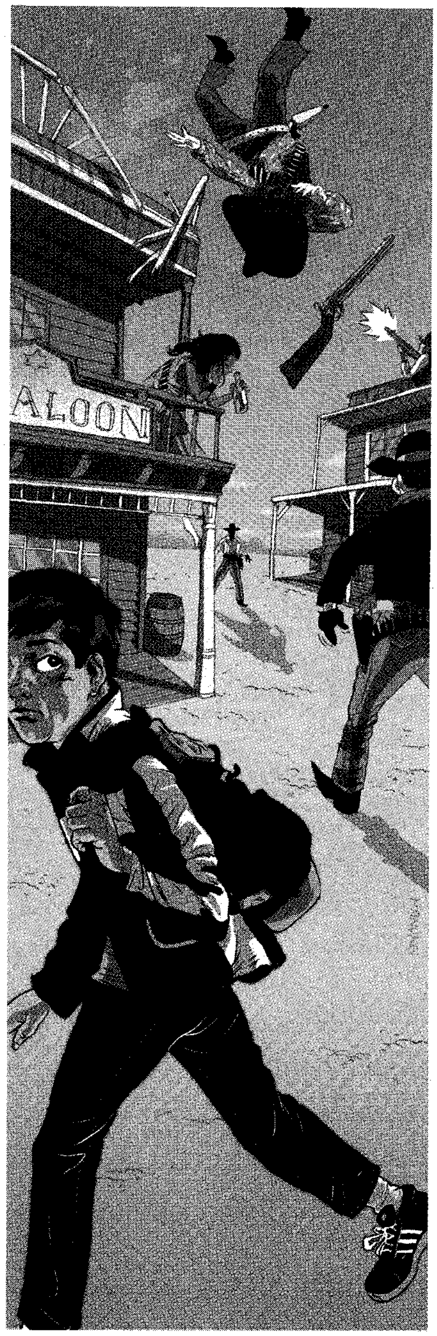
In Eminem's first movie, the white rap star plays a barely disguised version of his pre-celebrity self: Jimmy Smith, Jr., a wounded young man who lives in a trailer in inner-city Detroit with his slatternly mother (Kim Basinger). During jousts at a local club, Jimmy goes up against the best black rappers and fights for the respect of the black audience. These improvised raps are his only release, a spasmodic assertion of self. Curtis Hanson, working from a script by Scott Silver, lays out the narrative and the character relationships methodically, even slowly. The movie may be a shrewdly engineered piece of proletarian pop in the tradition of "Rocky" and "Saturday Night Fever," but Eminem's vile candor gives it a convincingly gritty tone, and the great Mexican cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto ("Amores Perros") keeps the visual palette ugly and raw. With Mekhi Phifer as a local rap impresario and Brittany Murphy as a bright-eyed little mover who takes to Jimmy.—*David Denby* (11/11/02) (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

FAR FROM HEAVEN

An immaculate new movie from Todd Haynes, the purveyor of "Safe" and "Velvet Goldmine." This project teams him once again with Julianne Moore, who looks set to become the Catherine Deneuve to Haynes's Buñuel. Here she plays—or incarnates, to the last inch of her hemline—a wife and mother, living in Hartford in 1957. All is well, if brittle, until she drops by to see her husband (Dennis Quaid) in his office after hours, and finds him entwined with a man. From here on, their lives start to shred and scatter; she herself falls for the gardener (Dennis Haysbert), who is not only black but, to all appearances, perfect. With tact and care, the movie digs into all the subjects that lay concealed below the surface when Max Ophuls and Douglas Sirk were filming their own melodramas in the nineteen-fifties. As an exercise in style, it cannot be faulted, and Moore takes us by surprise, even by storm, with the wealth and fullness of her feeling; yet there remains something prim in the whole endeavor—we know better than these beleaguered people did, and the movie can hardly help congratulating us, and itself, on that knowledge.—*A.L.* (11/18/02) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Kew Gardens Cinema, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and 72nd Street East.)

FRIDA

At the center of Julie Taymor's vibrant bio-pic is the relationship (always described as "tempestuous") between the great Mexican muralist Diego Rivera (Alfred Molina) and the talented painter Frida Kahlo (Salma Hayek). After an hour or so of this Punch-and-Judy show, with its noisy drinking, hurling of kitchen items, partings, and reconciliations, you may want to knock both lovers flat with an enormous chili pepper. Yet "Frida" is much better than it has any right to be. The movie has a rambunctious spirit and a liberated sense of color—an appreciation of the raw, strong Mexican folk tradition that gave both artists their special juice. Taymor and a gaggle of screenwriters are much too shrewd to accept the sentimental feminist view that Frida was Diego Rivera's victim. Smart, willful, and perverse, this Frida is nobody's servant, and the tiny Hayek plays her with head held high.—*D.D.* (11/11/02) (Angelika Film Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, and 19th Street East 6.)



SPANISH HIGH *Just in time for the holidays, a full helping of recent films from Spain at the Walter Reade Theatre. Leading the pack is Alex de la Iglesia's latest, "800 Bullets," an unabashed, topsy-turvy homage to the Western that's raucous fun, right down to the final gunfight.*

TOMER HANUKA

HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS

Two down, presumably five to go, and already the franchise is entering dangerous territory: if you aren't one of the many who know their Harry Potter chapter and verse, prepare for a nap. Like its predecessor, the movie is overlong and devoutly faithful to the book: the director Chris Columbus does everything but film J. K. Rowling's semicolons. Most of the original cast returns—a good thing—but so do many of the limp visual ideas. Kenneth Branagh, in a hammy role, makes for a welcome addition to the Hogwarts faculty, and it would have been fun to see him mix it up more with Alan Rickman. But all of the what-ifs matter little, as Columbus's film won't disappoint an eager audience that often calls out Harry's next move before it happens.—*M.A.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 1, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.)

THE HONEYMOON KILLERS

Based on the lives of the serial murderers Martha Beck and Raymond Fernandez, who met their victims through lonely-hearts clubs, and who were put to death at Sing Sing in 1951. This low-budget 1970 black-and-white movie is so literal-minded that it resembles a *True Detective* account of the case; it's as if someone re-created the Grade Z pictures of the forties and did so in absolute seriousness. After the almost incredible lack of depth of the first half hour, the film begins to acquire a fascination because of its total superficiality—it becomes something resembling minimal art. The writer-director, Leonard Kastle, whose first picture this was, keeps the images so brightly lit and so exactly planned and worked out that every ugly detail is in place—the hammer blow on the head, the trickle of blood, the ludicrous tongues sticking out of dead faces.—*P.K.* (Gramercy Theatre; Dec. 5-6.)

IMAGES

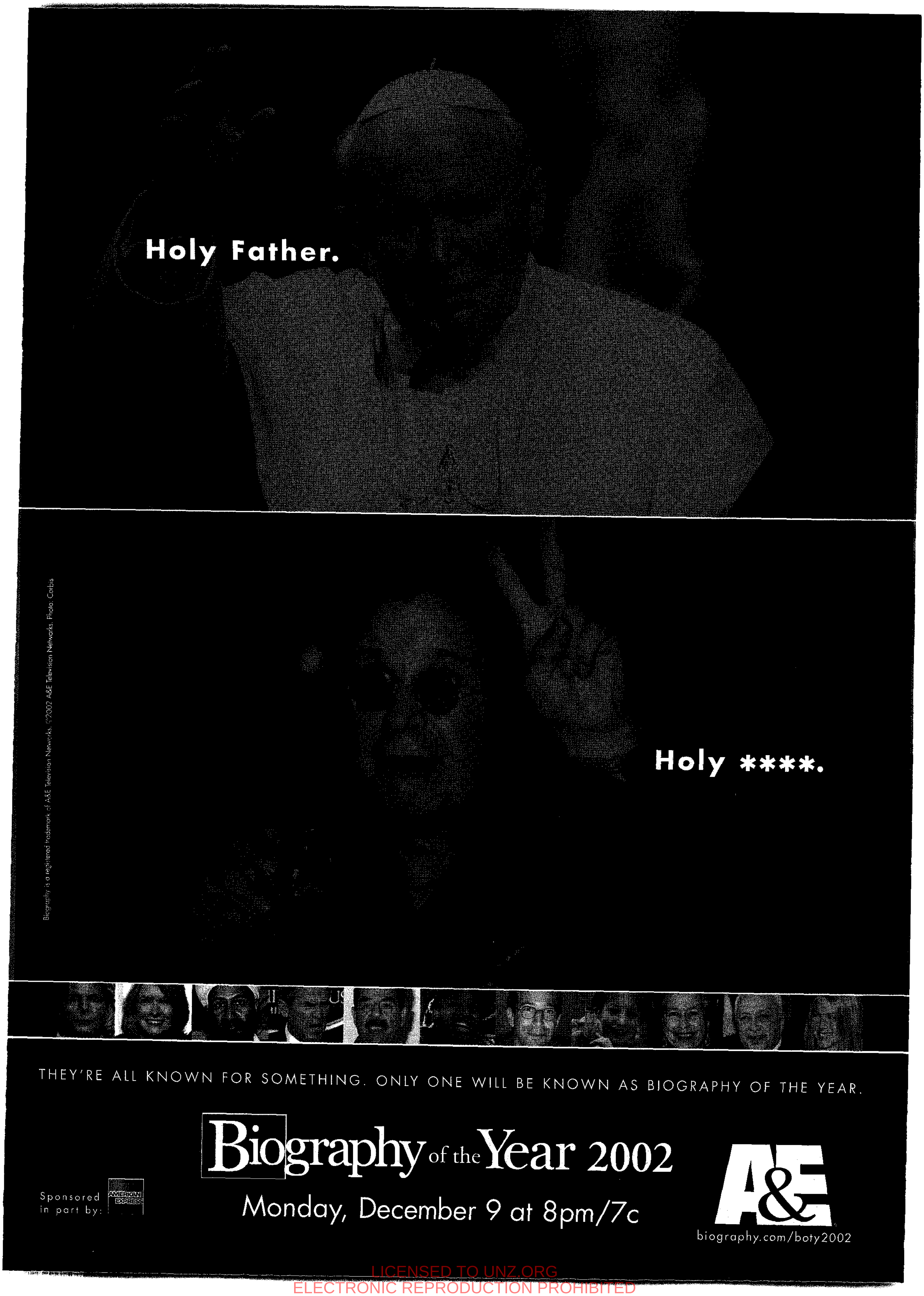
Robert Altman's 1972 variant of the "Caligari" ploy—the world as seen through a mad person's eyes. A classy schizo (Susannah York) duplicates herself, confuses the living with the dead, and can't tell her husband (René Auberjonois) from her lovers (Marcel Bozzufi, Hugh Millais). Her madness seems to be a matter of tinkling wind chimes, slivers of glass, windows, lenses, mirrors—"images." To be effective, the movie needs to draw us in to identify with her hallucinations, but the cold shine of the surfaces doesn't do it. The imagery itself fails to stir the imagination, though the cinematographer, Vilmos Zsigmond, shot some unusual landscapes, inhumanly clear and visible at a great distance, and there are some ravishing pastoral scenes. It's a hollow puzzle movie despite the seductive editing rhythms and the many inventive moments. From a screenplay by Altman, with improvisations.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Dec. 6-7.)

MASSOUD, THE AFGHAN

The Frenchman Christophe de Ponfilly, a committed activist filmmaker, returned to Afghanistan again and again over a seventeen-year-period, even after he halfway convinced himself that it was useless to point a camera at a war. His documentary, which has the feel of a rough-cut video journal, offers an original look at the country through time. It's filled with unsettling before-and-afters: a thriving commercial thoroughfare in Kabul becomes, years later, a ruin. But de Ponfilly's main subject is the Afghan commander Ahmed Shah Massoud, who, in 1997, at the time of the filming, was preparing an offensive against the Taliban. Understandably, de Ponfilly simplifies Massoud's role in the conflicts among the various warlords and the Taliban. He also idolizes the man, who comes off as devout, aloof, and under considerable strain. Because of their long-standing relationship, de Ponfilly is able to film the war councils, the mountaintop scouting, and in one defining moment, Massoud asleep on a rock, before yet another battle. With his assassination, in September of 2001, the film becomes an elegy to Massoud and remains an immediate, caught-on-the-run portrait of the resilient mujahideen. In French and Pashto.—*M.A.* (Film Forum.)

PARK ROW

Sam Fuller famously proclaimed, in Godard's "Pierrot le Fou," that film is "like a battleground: love, hate, action, violence, death . . . in a word, emotion." But he has also said that film is "potentially the greatest educational medium," and this odd, angular 1952 movie about an 1886 New York newspaper war illustrates what he meant—it marries journalistic lore to the dime novel. Fuller stirs Steve Brodie's legendary jump off the Brooklyn Bridge, the funding of the Statue of Liberty, and the creation of the Linotype machine into the eighty-three-minute story of the editor (Gene Evans) of an upstart journal. It's purest melodrama: Evans and his team are the salt of the asphalt, while their enemies on a big daily are alternately high-handed and underhanded. But Fuller the ex-reporter fills it with so much argot and info (he explains everything from the use of "—30—" at the end of a news story to the derivation of the phrase "off the cuff") and exploits



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his Old New York set so ingeniously that the result is entertaining and even instructive.—*M.S.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Dec. 5.)

PUNCH-DRUNK LOVE

Paul Thomas Anderson's whimsical romantic comedy is a bit like an amusement-park ride that builds tremendous forward momentum and then suddenly juts to the side. Even those of us who enjoy perversity in movies may be put off by its skittering, against-the-beat rhythms. Adam Sandler plays Barry Egan, a frightened fellow in a bright-blue suit, a nerd who sells merchandise out of a San Fernando Valley warehouse and stammers his way through the simplest encounters. At dawn, a harmonium is dropped from a truck outside the warehouse; a bit later, a lovely woman (Emily Watson) inexplicably falls in love with Barry as the music track offers drumbeats in arbitrary counterpoint to the imagery—in fact, everything that happens is arbitrary, and the characters are mysterious without becoming interesting. Anderson wants to say something quirky and powerful about love and the miraculousness of ordinary lives, but his world neither intersects with ours at any point nor hangs together as an independent magical creation. There are touches out of Harold Lloyd's and Jacques Tati's comedies and old Hollywood musicals, but just touches.—*D.D.* (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)

THE QUIET AMERICAN

The second adaptation of Graham Greene's novel, and, on the whole, a more successful effort than Joseph Mankiewicz's, of 1958. Michael Caine may lack the defeated nobility that Michael Redgrave brought to the role of the hero—a British journalist named Fowler—but few can beat Caine when it comes to the sad and the seedy. What is more, he squares off beautifully against Brendan Fraser. With his fine if bumbling manners, and the earnest thickness of his spectacles, Fraser is ideal as Pyle, the young do-gooder who, almost despite himself, winds up doing harm. The two men share a love for a young Vietnamese woman (Do Hai Yen), and the director, Phillip Noyce, manages not to whack us too hard with the symbolic weight of their rivalry. Greene fans, a prickly bunch at the best of times, will pick holes in the movie, but Christopher Doyle's camera, slithering through the rooms and battlegrounds of an alluring land, takes us as close as we could wish to the heart of the matter.—*A.L.* (12/2/02) (Cinema 2, Empire 25, and Village Theatre VII.)

SOLARIS

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, 34th Street Theatre, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

STANDING IN THE SHADOWS OF MOTOWN

The tambourine has never been used to greater effect than in the Motown singles of the sixties, and this documentary about the musicians who played on those tracks is a beautiful tribute to the exquisite finesse of the Motown sound. The director Paul Justman interviews close to a dozen members of the Hitsville U.S.A. house band, loosely known as the Funk Brothers, and their anecdotes and repartee are very sharp, very funny. When these old-timers sit around and begin, piece by piece, to play "Ain't Too Proud to Beg," the result is incandescent—and so is the film.—*B.D.* (Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, and 62nd & Broadway.)

TALK TO HER

In Pedro Almodóvar's odd but touching romantic drama, two very different men are drawn together by a common task: taking care of women who have fallen into a coma. Benigno (Javier Cámara), a shy, seemingly asexual young male nurse, looks after Alicia (Leonor Watling), a beautiful ballet dancer. Marco (Darío Grandinetti), a fortyish Argentine writer, becomes the lover of a fierce, long-waisted female bullfighter (Rosario Flores). After she is gored in the ring, she never speaks again. Both love affairs are touched by fantasy. Almodóvar's point appears to be that you can't have love without fable—that every love affair is an improbable narrative wrung from non-being and loneliness. The movie is shot in a new, subdued style for the director: past and present flow together, and everything seems touched with a melancholy magic. Two ballets by the choreographer Pina Bausch are integral to the film's themes. In Spanish.—*D.D.* (11/25/02) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

ALSO PLAYING

AUTO FOCUS (10/28/02)

Battery Park 16, Empire 25, 59th Street East Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kew Gardens Cinema, and Village Theatre VII.

BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE (10/28/02)

BAM Rose Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, and Sunshine Cinema.

EIGHT CRAZY NIGHTS

Battery Park 16, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, 34th Street Theatre, and Village Theatre VII.

THE EMPEROR'S CLUB

Battery Park 16, Beekman, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village Theatre VII.

PERSONAL VELOCITY

Angelika Film Center and First & 62nd Cinemas.

RABBIT-PROOF FENCE

Paris and Sunshine Cinema.

THE RING

Battery Park 16, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Union Square.

TREASURE PLANET

Battery Park 16, 84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, 34th Street Theatre, and Village East Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn.
Battery Park 16, West St. at Vesey St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinemas 1, 2, and 3, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Kew Gardens Cinema, 81-05 Lefferts Blvd., Queens (718-441-9835).
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Twin, Broadway at 99th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
Sunshine Cinema, 139-143 E. Houston St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th Street Theatre, 312 W. 34th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Dec. 29: A Martin Scorsese retrospective. Dec. 7 at 2: "The Last Temptation of Christ" (1988). ♦ Dec. 7 at 5: Short works by Scorsese (1986-1990). ♦ Dec. 8 at 1: "Goodfellas" (1990). ♦ Dec. 8 at 4: "The Age of Innocence" (1993).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-777-3456)—Dec. 5 at 7:15: "Earth" (†). ♦ Dec. 6 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:10 and Dec. 7 at 5, 7, and 9:10: "My Name Is Ivan" (1962, Andrei Tarkovsky; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 8 at 4:10 and 8: "Andrei Rublev" (1966, Tarkovsky; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 9 at 5 and 8: "The Sacrifice" (1986, Tarkovsky; in English and Swedish). ♦ Dec. 10 at 7: "Arsenal" (1929, Aleksandr Dovzhenko; silent).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Dec. 4-5 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls" (1970, Russ Meyer). ♦ Through Dec. 19: "Altman's 70s." Dec. 6-7 at 1:30, 3:30, 5:30, 7:30, and 9:30: "Images" (†). ♦ Dec. 8 at 1:30, 4:30, and 7:30: "Nashville" (1975). ♦ Dec. 9 at 1:25, 5:30, and 9:40: "H.E.A.L.T.H." (1979). ♦ Dec. 9 at 3:25 and 7:30: "A Perfect Couple" (1979). ♦ Dec. 10 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Three Women" (1977).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL

55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Neo-noir films. Dec. 10 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "The Sandmen" (2000, Pierre Salvadori; in French).

GRAMERCY THEATRE

127 E. 23rd St. (777-4900)—Through Jan. 30: "Positif Champions: Fifty Years of Cinema," a celebration of the French film monthly. Dec. 5 at 4: "The African Queen" (1951, John Huston). ♦ Dec. 5 at 6:15 and Dec. 6 at 2: "Almost Peaceful" (2002, Michel Deville; in French). ♦ Dec. 5 at 8:30 and Dec. 6 at 4: "The Honeymoon Killers" (†). ♦ Dec. 6 at 6:15: "The Errand Boy" (1961, Jerry Lewis). ♦ Dec. 6 at 8:30: "The Ladies' Man" (1961, Lewis). ♦ Dec. 7 at 4 and Dec. 9 at 2: "Boxcar Bertha" (†). ♦ Dec. 7 at 6:30 and Dec. 8 at 1: "Fear of Fear" (1975, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German). ♦ Dec. 7 at 8:45 and Dec. 8 at 3:15: "City of Sadness" (1989, Hou Hsiao-Hsien; in Taiwanese, Mandarin, and Japanese). ♦ Dec. 9 at 4: "Kiss Me Deadly" (1955, Robert Aldrich).

NEW YORK EXPO

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (505-7742)—Dec. 6-12: The thirty-sixth year of the international shorts festival will include Alexander Sokurov's "Elegy of a Voyage" and Bob Giraldi's 9/11 work, "The Routine." See www.nyexpo.org for a complete schedule.

SUNSHINE CINEMA

139-143 E. Houston St. (358-0573)—Midnight movies. Dec. 6-7: "Star Trek II: The Wrath of Kahn" (1982, Nicholas Meyer).

THALIA THEATRE

2537 Broadway, at 95th St. (864-5400)—Recent cinema from Brazil. All films are in Portuguese. Dec. 7 at 2:30: Short films. ♦ Dec. 7 at 5 and Dec. 8 at 7: "Cambara Moon" (2002, Roserberg Caríry). ♦ Dec. 7 at 7:30 and Dec. 8 at 2:30: "Limite" (1931, Mario Peixoto; silent). ♦ Dec. 7 at 9:45 and Dec. 8 at 4:45: "At the Edge of the Earth" (2001, Sérgio Machado). ♦ Dec. 8 at 9: "The Old Soldier's Ballad" (2002, Vinicius Reis).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (875-5600)—A tribute to Sam Fuller. Dec. 5 at 8:30: "Park Row" (†). ♦ Through Dec. 26: "Spanish Cinema Now." Dec. 6 at 2 and 9:30 and Dec. 10 at 3:30: "X" (2002, Luis Marias). ♦ Dec. 6 at 4, Dec. 7 at 1:30, Dec. 8 at 8:30, and Dec. 9 at 6: "Don Quixote, Knight Errant" (2002, Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón). ♦ Dec. 6 at 7 and Dec. 7 at 9: "Intact" (2001, Juan Carlos Fresnadillo). ♦ Dec. 7-8 at 4: "Salomé" (2002, Carlos Saura). ♦ Dec. 7 at 6:15 and Dec. 8 at 1: "800 Bullets" (2002, Alex de la Iglesia). ♦ Dec. 8 at 6:15: "La Comunidad" (2000, de la Iglesia). ♦ Dec. 9 at 1 and 9: "Rancor" (2002, Miguel Albaladejo). ♦ Dec. 9 at 3:15 and Dec. 10 at 1: "Octavia" (2002, Basilio Martín Patiño).

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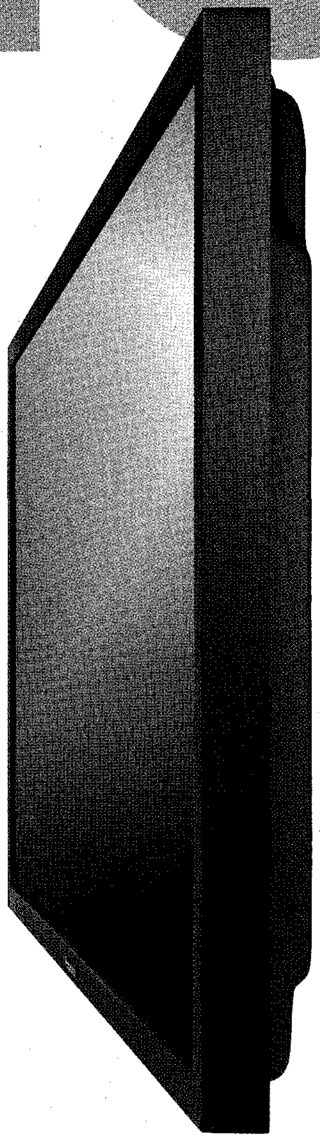
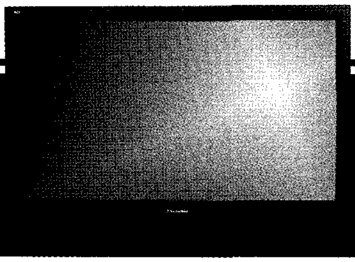


Screen measured diagonally.



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READING

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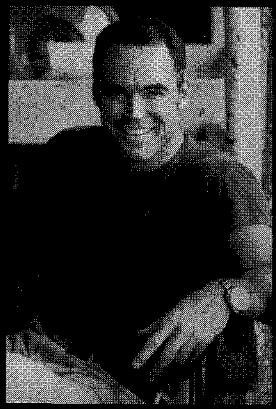
GLASSES

"Dark End of the Street" by Ace Atkins

Author Focus: Ace Atkins, 32, has written three mystery-thrillers set in the South. "Dark End of the Street," his latest, is published by William Morrow. A native of Alabama, Atkins lives on a century-old farm outside of Oxford, Mississippi.


Jay E. Nolan

ACE ATKINS
DARK END
of the
STREET
A NOVEL

"It's great to be part of the community of writers," says Atkins, anticipating his upcoming Bacardi O reading in Manhattan. "They turn down the lights, and I go up and read stories about my eccentric neighbors, the blues, and the Mississippi Delta—things I care about. But it's also going to be surreal: I've been working on a story in rural Oxford, thinking about coyotes—and the next minute I'll be dodging cabs in New York."

Given the balls-to-the-wall bravado of Nick Travers, the action-ready hero of "Dark End of the Street," Ace Atkins is likely to be undaunted. His hero, a former professional football player who has found his niche as a "blues tracker" (a finder of lost recording artists) is on the trail of a singer who vanished in 1968. But so are a crooked casino operator, an Elvis wannabe, a white-supremacist politician, a beauty-contest-winner-turned-assassin, the Dixie Mafia, and a roadhouse full of down-home blues musicians.

As Travers makes his way across Mississippi's Highway 61, past back roads and cotton fields, blues clubs and barbecue joints, the story virtually creates its own soundtrack. The haunting strains of Otis Redding, Percy Sledge, Wilson Pickett, Booker T. & the MG's, and Elvis himself are all woven into this Southern noir yarn.

"This was not Motown," Travers is quick to point out. "Motown was black music for white teens. Southern soul, Memphis soul, was black music for blacks. Funky, marinated, and deep-fried in gospel roots with the intensity of a church revival."

A lover of the blues and a former athlete much like his main character, Atkins was featured on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* in 1993, when as defensive end he helped propel Auburn University's football team to an undefeated season. After graduation, his crime reportage at the *Tampa Tribune* earned him a Pulitzer Prize nomination. Yet, "Getting a book out," says the man with mojo, "was the high point of my life."

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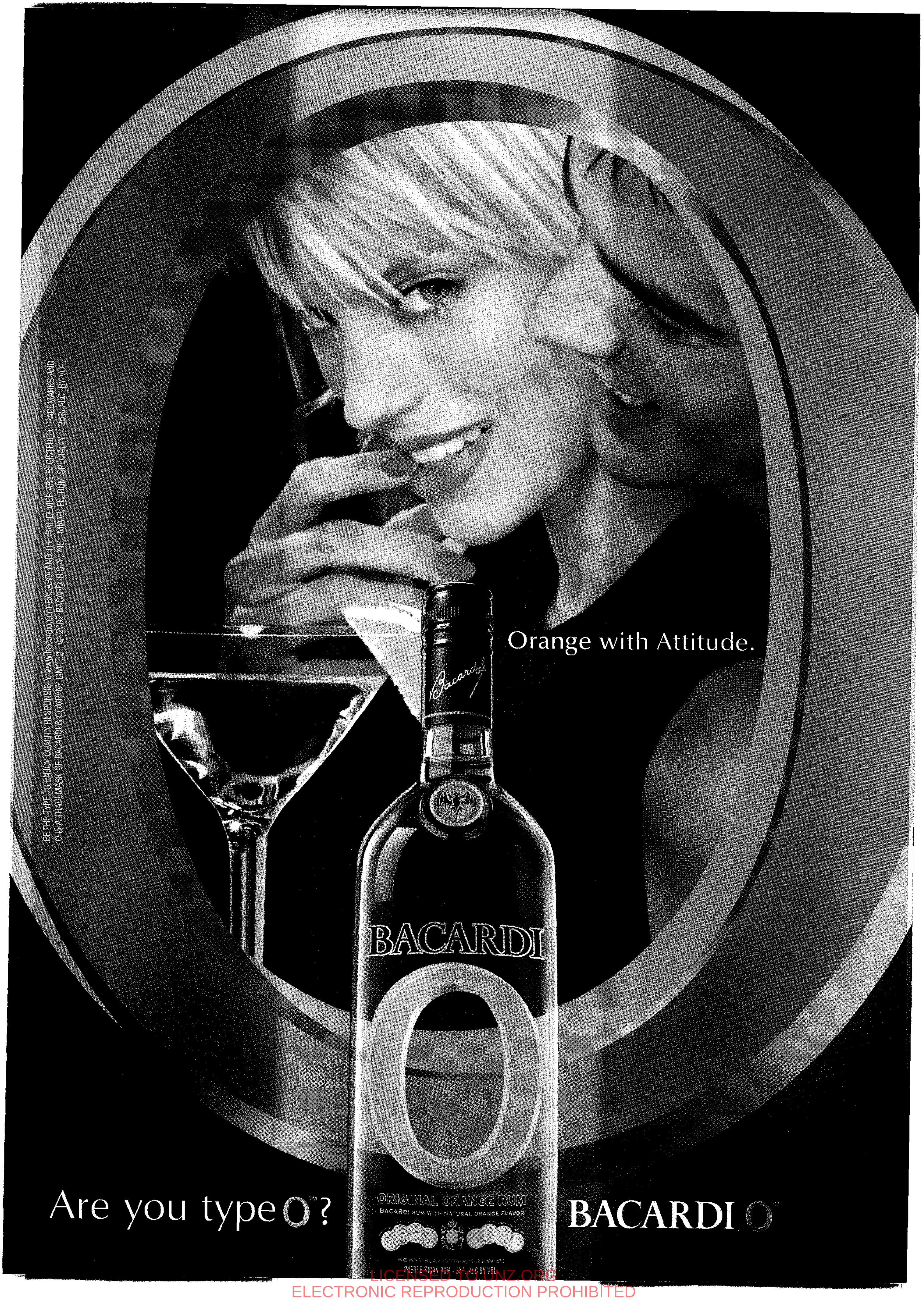
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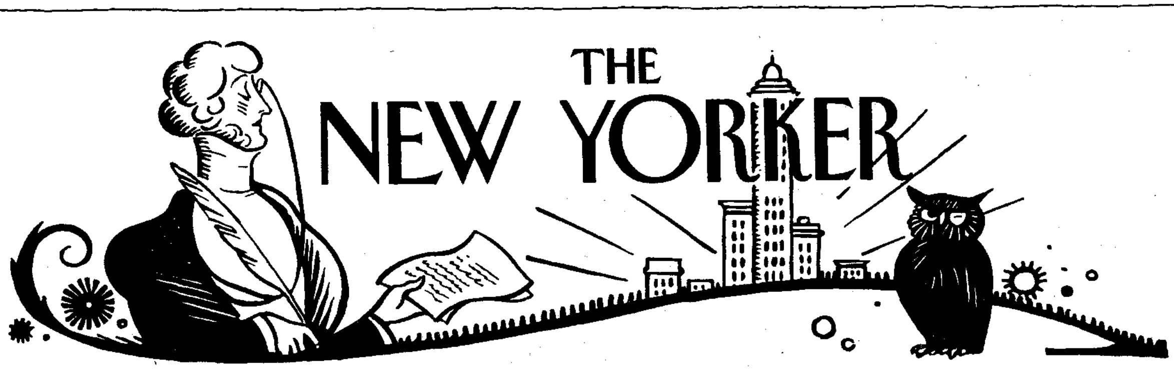
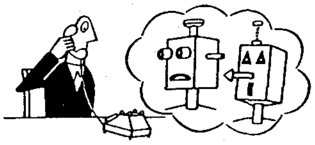


THE TALK OF THE TOWN

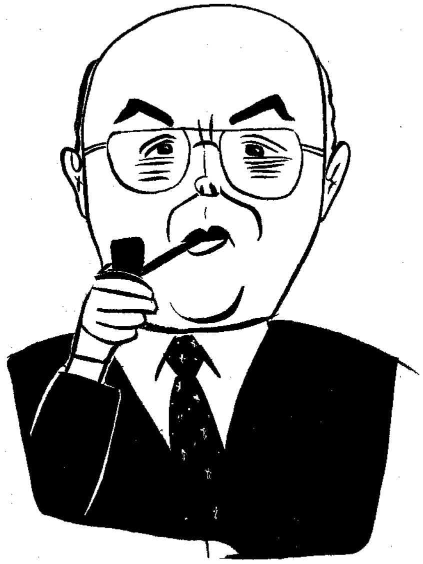
COMMENT
TOO MUCH INFORMATION



When it comes to concocting fevered visions of the future as a way of illuminating the present, Jules Verne got some things right in his time, Aldous Huxley got others, and George Orwell got still others. In our time—in this terror-haunted interlude (we hope) of background-hum dread and well-founded paranoia—no literary divinator gets it righter than the sci-fi pulp master Philip K. Dick, author of "Clans of the Alphane Moon" and dozens of other books, and inspirer of some of Hollywood's spookiest dystopias, including "Blade Runner," "Total Recall," and "Minority Report." And this is odd, given that he has been dead for twenty years. Too bad he's not still around. It would be interesting to get his take on the Information Awareness Office of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency of the Department of Defense.

The Information Awareness Office plays it so weird that one can't help suspecting that somebody on its staff might be putting us on. The Information Awareness Office's official seal features an occult pyramid topped with mystic all-seeing eye, like the one on the dollar bill. Its official motto is "Scientia Est Potentia," which doesn't mean "science has a lot of potential." It means "knowledge is power." And its official mission is to "imagine, develop, apply, integrate, demonstrate and transition information technologies, components and prototype, closed-loop, information systems that will counter asymmetric threats by achieving total information awareness."

The phrase "total information awareness" is creepy enough to merit a place alongside "USA Patriot Act" and "Department of Homeland Security," but it is not the Information Awareness Office's only gift to the language. The "example technologies" which the Office intends to develop include "entity extraction from natural language text," "biologically inspired algorithms for agent control," and "truth maintenance." One of the Office's thirteen subdivisions, the Human Identification at a Distance (HumanID) program, is letting contracts not only for "Face Recognition" and "Iris Recognition" but also for "Gait Recognition." (Tony Blair has pledged the full coöperation of the Ministry of Silly Walks.) Another of the thirteen, FutureMap, "will concentrate on market-based techniques for avoiding surprise and predicting future events"—a sounder approach, ideologically, than regulation-based liberal soothsaying.



John M. Poindexter

The Information Awareness Office is working on some really cool stuff that will eventually turn up at Brookstone and the Sharper Image, like a Palm Pilot-size PDA that does instantaneous English-Arabic and English-Chinese translations. But the Office's main assignment is, basically, to turn everything in cyberspace about everybody—tax records, driver's-license applications, travel records, bank records, raw F.B.I. files, telephone records, credit-card records, shopping-mall security-camera videotapes, medical records, every e-mail anybody ever sent—into a single, humongous, multi-googolplexibyte database that electronic robots will mine for patterns of information suggestive of terrorist activity. Dr. Strangelove's vision—"a chikentic gomplex of gumbyuders"—is at last coming into its own.

It's easy to ridicule this—fun, too, and fun is something the war on terrorism doesn't offer a lot of—but it's not so easy to dismiss the possibility that the project, nutty as it sounds, might actually be of significant help in uncovering terrorist networks. The problem is that it would also be of significant help in uncovering

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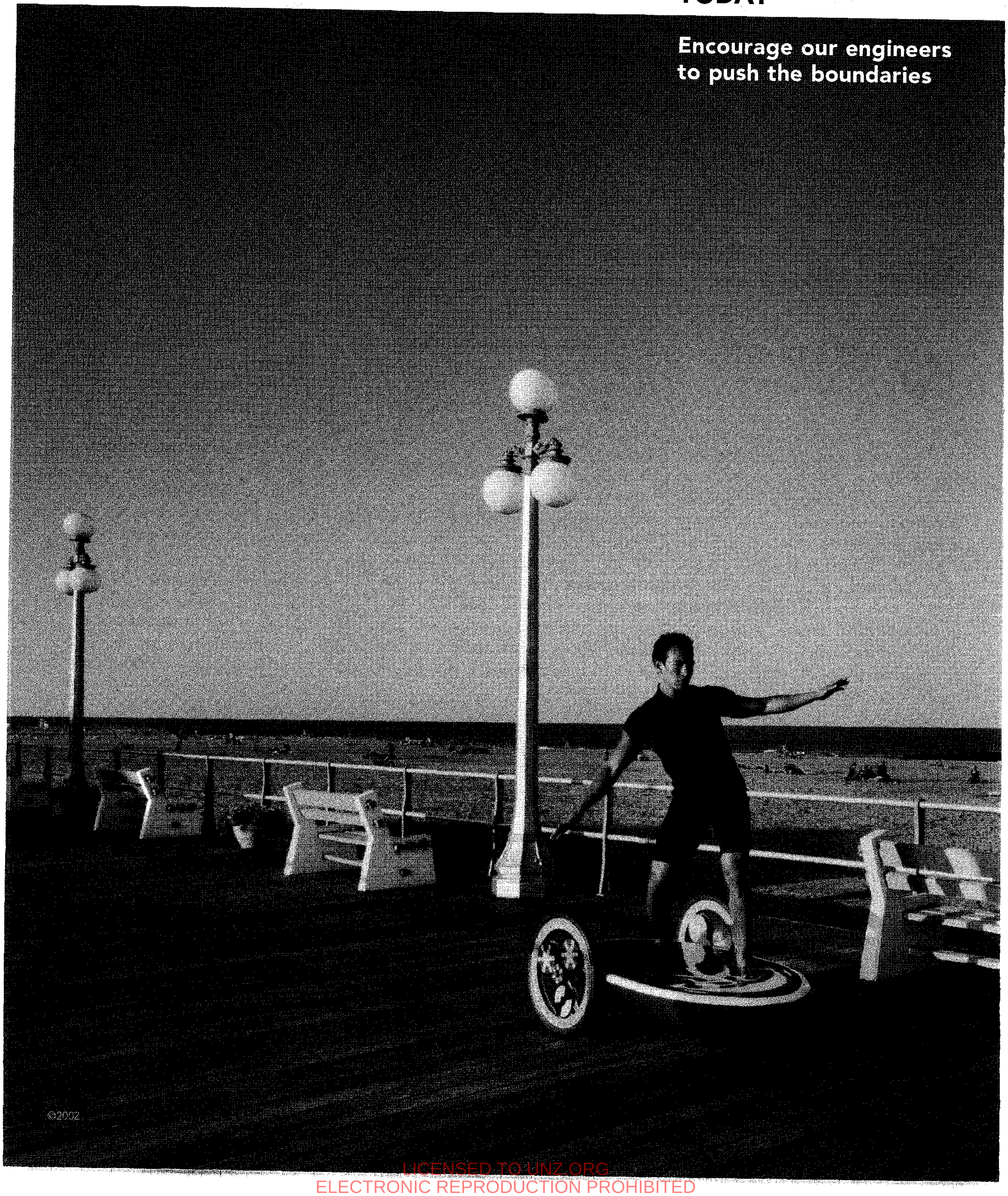
TODAY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TOMORROW

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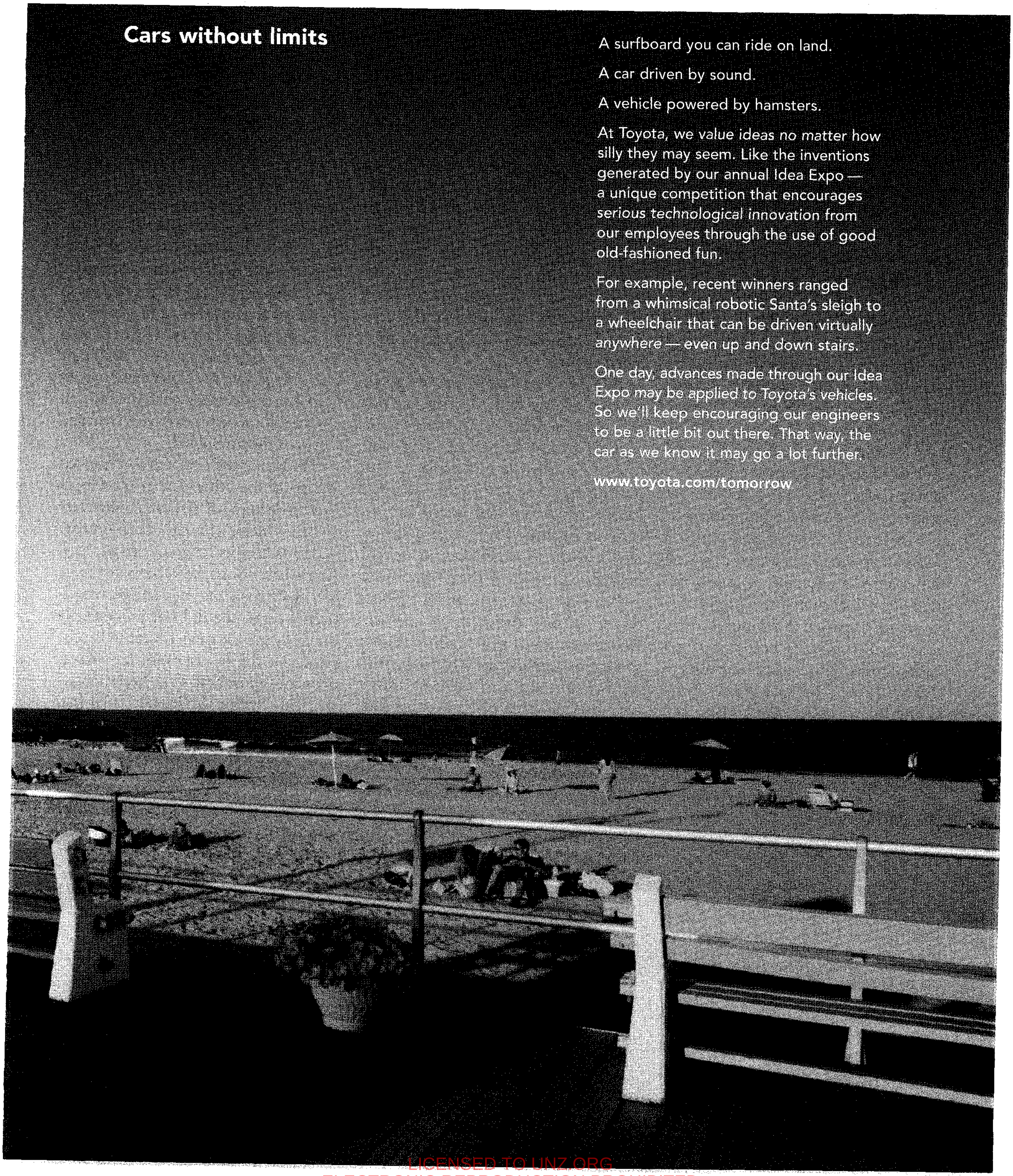

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just about everything, including the last vestiges of individual and family privacy. This is why William Safire wrote the other day that the program should simply be shut down, as was Attorney General Ashcroft's Terrorism Information and Prevention System (TIPS), which was going to enlist postal workers and the like as amateur spies.

At a minimum, a temporary shutdown, pending some sort of congressional review and the creation of safeguards, would seem to be in order. It will take years for total information awareness to get beyond the prototype stage. But if a working system ever does get up and running, you won't have to be Philip K. Dick to imagine the possibilities for mischief, especially if carelessness, to say nothing of malevolence, enters the picture. But not to worry. "The privacy of individuals not affiliated with terrorism" will be protected via "technologies for controlling automated search and exploitation algorithms and for purging data structures appropriately."

And who is offering this highly reassuring assurance? Why, the Director of the Information Awareness Office, John M. Poindexter, that's who. The Office's Web site offers biographical sketches of the new agency's principal bureaucrats—or did offer them until the night of November 26th, when they mysteriously disappeared. Poindexter's is, or was, in the form of a résumé, of exactly the kind one would submit to a prospective corporate employer. It is a model of the genre: two crisp pages, neatly typed, no oddball fonts. The career it describes—Caltech Ph.D., flag-rank naval officer, White House senior staffer, high-tech business executive—is impressive. On the other hand, the information provided falls somewhat short of total. The passage concerning Poindexter's stint as Ronald Reagan's national-security adviser concludes as follows:

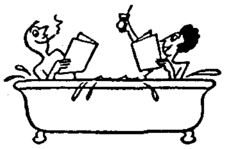
> Major events in which he played a significant role included: Strategic Defense Initiative, Grenada Rescue Operation, Achille Lauro incident, Libyan Operation to respond to terrorist attacks, Reykjavik Summit with Soviets, peaceful transition of government in the Philippines, support for the democratic resistance in Nicaragua, and an attempt to begin rationalization of U.S. relationship with strategically important Iran.

Cryptologists will detect in the last two items a reference to what made Poindexter, for a time, famous: the scheme to sell arms secretly to the mullahs of Iran and use the proceeds to get around a congressional ban on funding the anti-Sandinista guerrillas of Nicaragua. Poindexter's role in what became the messiest political scandal of the nineteen-eighties got him convicted of five felonies (including two counts of lying to Congress) and sentenced to six months in the federal penitentiary. He was saved from jail by an appeals-court ruling that his trial had been tainted by his own testimony, given under a grant of immunity, before a congressional committee. The facts of the case, however, stand. So does the conclusion of the trial judge, Harold H. Greene, that Poindexter's actions traduced the principle "that those elected by and responsible to the people shall make the important policy decisions, and that their decisions may not be nullified by appointed officials who happen to be in positions that give them the ability to operate programs prohibited by law."

But even when intentions are good, as conservatives should know, it's not enough. (The F.B.I. was supposed to be a bunch of clean-cut guys chasing bank robbers, but by the mid-sixties it was putting tape recorders under Martin Luther King's bed and urging him to commit suicide.) We may not always have a leader as punctilious about civil liberties as President Bush—and even he has some people around him (Poindexter, for one; Ashcroft, for another) whose devotion to the Bill of Rights sometimes seems shaky. Maybe the Administration needs to catch up on its sci-fi reading. Philip K. meant his dark visions as warnings, not as bureaucratic charters for George W. Unfortunately, Bush doesn't know Dick.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

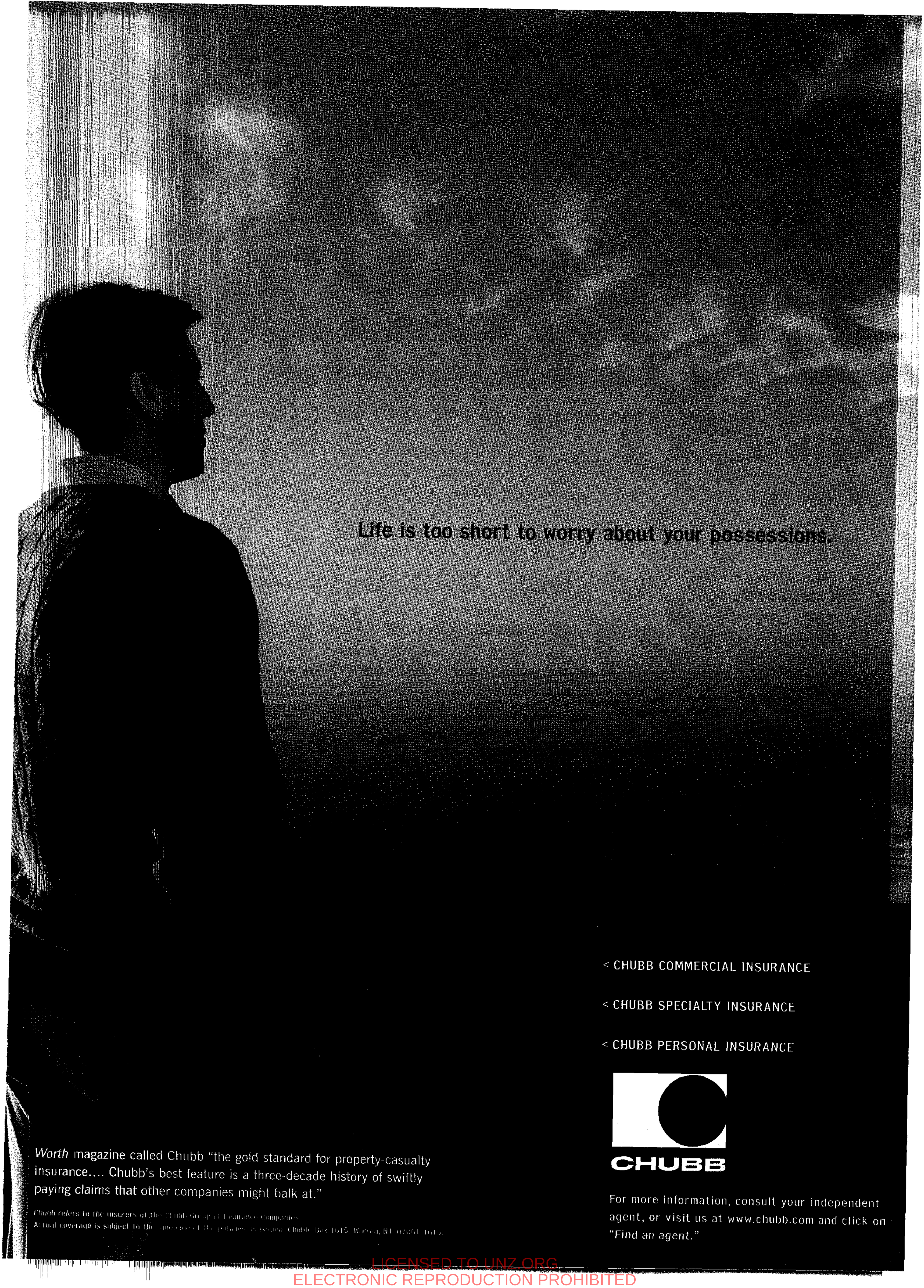
DEPT. OF COMMITMENT
UNMARITAL BLISS



Dorian Solot and Marshall Miller are the founders of the Alternatives to Marriage Project and the authors of the newly published book "Unmarried to Each Other: The Essential Guide to Living Together as an Unmarried Couple," which advocates for the rights of couples who live together without being legally wed. Solot and Miller have been unmarried for nearly a decade, since they were undergraduates at Brown, and they decided to write the book because they were frustrated by the presumption of matrimony by which they were often met—the prospective landlord who wanted to know when they were getting hitched; the car-rental company that charged extra to allow Solot to be listed as a second driver. "Unmarried to Each Other" addresses couples in all kinds of unmarriages: those who can't marry because they are gay; those who won't marry because of political objections to the institution; and those who just haven't yet made up their minds. It includes practical information about how to obtain domestic-partnership rights, as well as tips to help couples figure out whether they are ready for unmarriage, such as "It would be a rude surprise to find out a year from now that your partner saw cohabitation as an unspoken engagement when you thought it would be a good way to save on rent and see how things unfolded."

The book's publication was celebrated at a party the other day, in the Upper West Side home of Ashton Applewhite and Bob Stein, who have been unmarried to each other for going on ten years. At the party, Solot, who is twenty-nine, said that when she met Miller, who is twenty-eight, she did not immediately think, Here's the man I want to be unmarried to for the rest of my life. "It was not one of those head-over-heels things," she said. Neither Miller nor Solot had actually ever popped the question of whether to become unmarried; their relationship had just evolved in that direction. Though both agree that everything is working really well as it is now, Miller said he did not rule out the possibility that things could end in un-unmarriage. "We joke that we can't get married because we've written this book," he said. "But we never say never."

Among the guests were other happily unmarried couples in their late twenties, like Joe Lowndes and Priscilla Yamin, who are both finishing their Ph.D.s in political science at the New School. Lowndes said that he had always wanted to be unmarried—"I was an activist and anarchist for years, and I am not comfort-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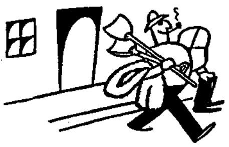
able with my private relationships being wrapped up with state policies," he explained—but that it was not until he met Yamin that he knew he had found the woman he wanted to be unmarried to. After seven years together, they held what they called a "Commitzvah," at which they exchanged vows, drank from a kiddush cup, and handed out little bells that friends and family were asked to ring at the moment the unmarriage was sealed. The Commitzvah is described in a chapter of the book about commitment ceremonies. ("There's no reason why you can't wear the white dress, walk down the aisle, exchange I do's and rings, and dance the Electric Slide all night long.") Yamin said that being formally unmarried did add an unexpected emotional dimension to the relationship, and that both families enjoyed the Commitzvah. "My mother was very happy—she was like, 'I'll take whatever you're giving me,' " Yamin said.

Other guests at the book party were uncertain about whether unmarriage was right for them. Michael Oates Palmer, a writer for "The West Wing," said that his recent experience of unmarriage had been unnerving. "I was just unmarried to someone for the last five months," he said. "It was a relationship where I was hoping it would make the transition to not-being-unmarried status, but she decided that it should make the transition to not-being-in-a-relationship status." Palmer's friend Lockhart Steele was at the party with Salma Abdelnour, whom he said he had been seeing for nine months. Their unmarital status, though, was still somewhat undefined. "I'm unmarried to her, but we're not unmarried in Dorian and Marshall's sense of it," Steele said. "You might even say we're just dating."

—*Rebecca Mead*

GIFTS AHOY
SALE BOAT



There could hardly be any news more thrilling to discount-minded Manhattanites, whose bargain-hunting triumphs are usually on the order of buying a couple of bags of postholiday candy at Duane Reade at fifty per cent off (you've just missed the last of the brown and orange Halloween M&M's, but soon enough there will be half-price Reese's peanut-butter Christmas trees), than that Target has come to town. Manhattan has a lot going for it, but until two weeks ago we didn't have a Target store. And, just like that, Target has already been taken away. The Minneapolis-based store set up shop on a boat at Chelsea Piers for a fortnight that just ended, to test the waters for a possible full-blown store in Manhattan and to give New Yorkers who couldn't make it to Chelsea Piers in time the familiar, nagging feeling that they missed out on something. (Actually, there are Target stores in the New York area, including one in Brooklyn and two in Queens, but we're talking about Manhattan here.)

As a classic Target shopping experience, the Target experiment was a disappointment, because the only goods on offer were ninety-two holiday items. Normally, a Target store—even one not designated a Super Target—has jillions of items for sale, including many things that you need and many more that you don't need but somehow end up buying anyway; because everything is so cheap, you go into a Target intending to spend about twenty dollars, and you leave having spent a hundred and sixty-five. And it is important to go to Target in a car, not by subway or bus: unless you load up your trunk with six or seven Target bags filled with things that you're not sure why you bought, get home and unload them, hoping the neighbors won't see you making several trips back and forth to your car with armloads of stuff, and feel both pleased by your sharp eye for a bargain and slightly ill from a sensation of excess—even if the excess is on a reasonable scale, like paying seven dollars for three twelve-packs of Diet Coke when you need (and have room for) only one twelve-pack—you haven't really shopped at Target properly.

At the entrance to the pier where the holiday boat was docked, the red-and-white bull's-eye logo was everywhere, and you could feel yourself becoming more alert and quietly crazy with anticipation, the way your cat looks when it sees a bird on the windowsill. You walked through a series of tents, where Target employees, wearing long-sleeved red shirts that said "Target crew" on the front and "U.S.S. Target" on the back (shirts that were not, alas, for sale to the public), greeted customers and offered them free hot cider to warm them on their journey. And then you finally got to the boat, where, on a blustery, cold Tuesday afternoon a few days after the opening, there were about twice as many employees as customers. The gift items were sealed off behind clear plastic in white structures meant to look like icebergs, and you couldn't actually get your hands on anything. Cubes of printed Post-it notes sat next to each item; if you wanted to buy something, you attached a note to the flyer that a smiling crew member had handed to you on the way in, along with a card telling you "How to Shop": "Once you've finished shopping, please proceed to the Target store tent and present your shopping list to a Target team member and they will gather your gifts in a basket for you."

It would be too much to ask for a boat to have one of those fabulous shopping-cart escalators you find in some Target stores, which run parallel to the ones that move people and are timed to run a little slower, so that when you arrive at the top you have enough time to move to the side and greet your cart as it rolls off the steps ("Oh, man—this is *so great*," you say to yourself), but there weren't even any shopping carts or baskets, so you couldn't feel uncomfortably overloaded, which is also a key element of the Target experience. There was not much to tempt shoppers: a waffle iron (the fact that it was designed by Michael Graves and looks like a U.F.O. means only that it will be used perhaps twice instead of once, before

"It's not about OAK BARRELS *and chemistry."*

A CONVERSATION WITH CLOS DU BOIS WINEMAKER MARGARET DAVENPORT

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being put away permanently); a Rapunzel Barbie doll (a rather poignant and pointless identity for Barbie, since even upon being liberated from the tower she can't walk anywhere); a $7.99 beaded sheath for a wine bottle ("bottle jewelry," it was called); and a shower radio equipped, puzzlingly, with a snooze button. Customers were seen leaving Target empty-handed, heads down as they walked sadly toward the M23 bus, their dreams of buying too much toothpaste and toilet paper, and too many six-dollar T-shirts, some of which they don't even like and will give away in a year when they realize they've never worn them but which they couldn't resist at the time, now and perhaps forever unfulfilled.

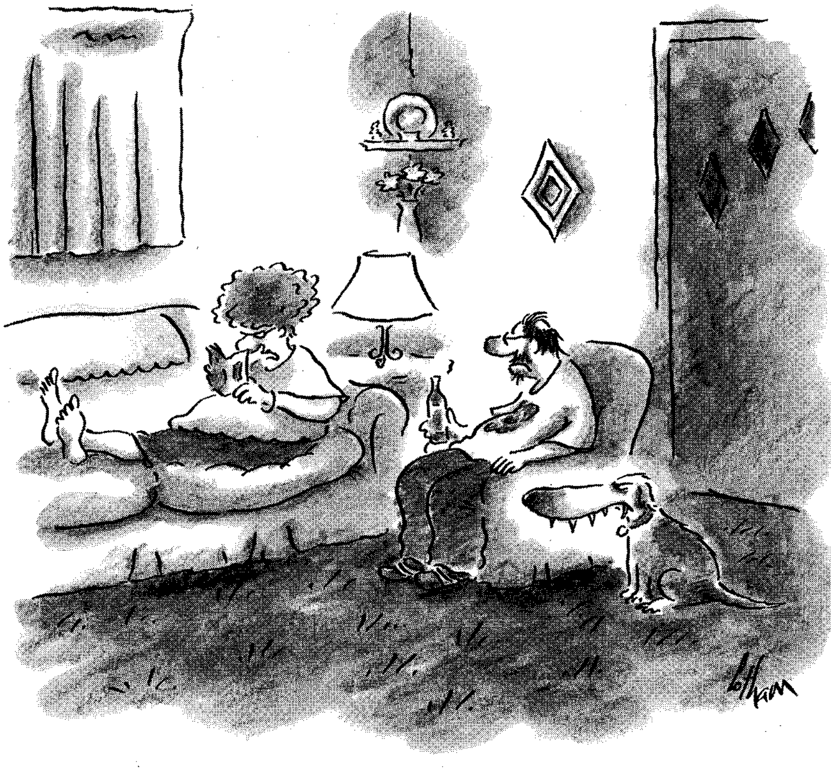
—*Nancy Franklin*

SECONDI PIATTI
A MEMORABLE MEAL

The re-creation the other night of Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonist dinner did not go *exactly* the way the original dinner did, on November 7, 1468, when Ficino, the philosopher, sat down with eight fellow-Neoplatonists, at the Medici Villa at Careggi, in Tuscany, to celebrate the anniversary of Plato's birth and death. For one thing, Ficino was a red-wine man, but the Pierpont Morgan Library, where the re-created banquet was held, didn't like the idea of people spilling red wine on the precious manuscripts, so the Italian Cultural Foundation of America, one of the event's sponsors, went with white instead. For another, the Medici Villa was, in accordance with Ficino's specifications, "high and far away from heavy and cloudy air," whereas the Morgan villa is in midtown.

However, some of the two hundred or so guests who were at the Morgan, on a recent rainy night, did show up in period dress, including Carolin Young, who came up with the idea for the evening, and whose new book, "Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver," describes a series of historical banquets. Young was wearing a gown made of fabric that had been modelled on a cloak worn by Lorenzo de' Medici, the sponsor of the original meal, in Benozzo Gozzoli's fifteenth-century fresco "Procession of the Magi." "I'm pretty obsessive," Young said.

Young has a lot of historical-meal re-creation experience. Two years ago, in a Sotheby's boardroom, she re-created a dinner that Casanova shared with a young nun in 1753, which might have included pigeon "*à l'impromptu*" and "chicken in panties." The Morgan evening began with Young describing the Ficino banquet and the Renaissance view of the body as a system of four humors—sanguine, choleric, melancholic, and phlegmatic. She encouraged participants to eat with an eye to their prevailing humor. "I suffer from an overabundance of melancholy," she said. "Therefore I should eat the warm and wet foods." She conceded that not all of the Renaissance dietary precepts would be followed that evening. Ficino encouraged aging Tuscans to drink the milk of a beautiful teen-ager, mixed with sugar and fennel. "He also advised that, if you can't find a beautiful lactating teen-ager, you should drink a young person's blood," Young said. "We don't have either of those two options tonight, I'm sorry to tell you."



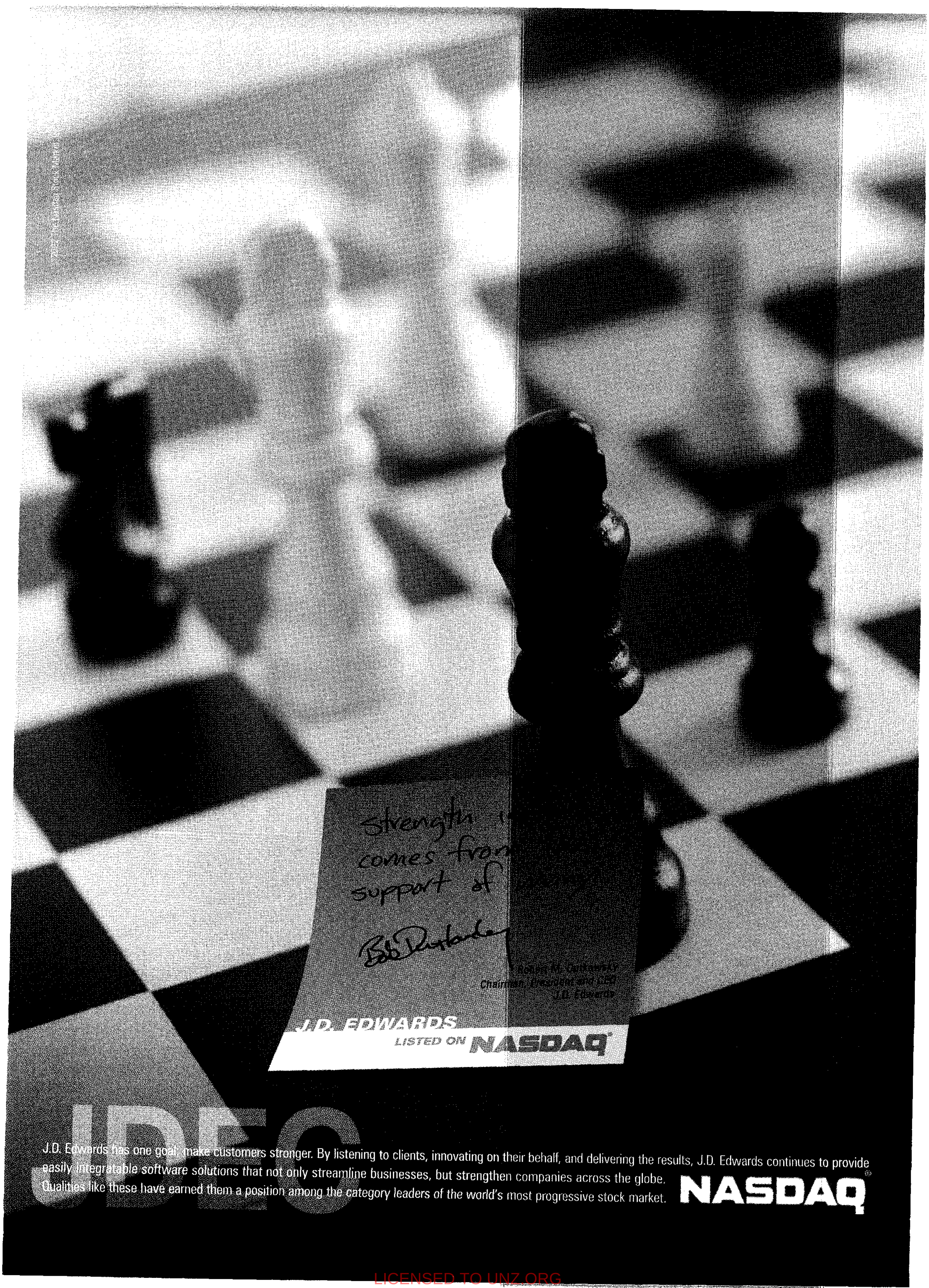
"O.K., I hate you, but not because you're an American."

When Young was done, the guests were released into the Morgan Library's food-stuffed galleries to pursue humoral dietary theory: among the towering trays and sumptuous platters were herb-stuffed quail eggs with cheese and raisins, artichoke torte, mozzarella-and-chard torte, and Taleggio toasts with cinnamon. Looking on anxiously were two of the caterers—Marika Seguso, from Milan, and Adam Sikora, from Mill Basin, Brooklyn—who had never re-created a historical meal before. "We found it very challenging but very exciting," Sikora said. Seguso said she recognized Renaissance cooking techniques in contemporary regional Italian cuisine; those techniques may have been less familiar to Sikora, given that the contemporary cuisine of his region, as he noted, is deli.

The banquet culminated with a performance by Riccardo Marasco, the Pete Seeger of Tuscany, who sang "La Canzona delle Dee," a fifteenth-century song that ended with the words *"Fiorenza è il Paradiso!"* The neo-Neoplatonists responded with enlightened-sounding applause. Then they wandered out into the midtown rain and began hailing cabs.

Back inside, Carolin Young said she hadn't even eaten anything—she was too excited. In fact, she didn't eat until the next day at around noon. She went out to the Good World Bar and Grill, on Orchard Street, and had a hamburger. "I was ravenous," she said.

—*Robert Sullivan*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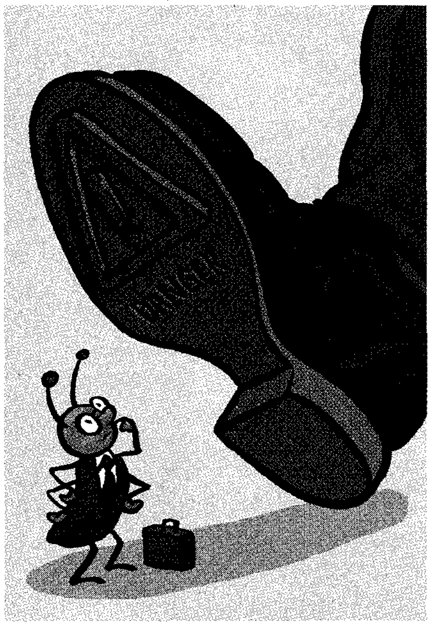
THE FINANCIAL PAGE
THE TALKING CURE

When you think of Wall Street, candor is probably not the first word that leaps to mind, but in the past few months the Street has been gripped by it. Merrill Lynch now warns, on the first page of each of its research reports, that it may be seeking "investment banking or other business relationships from the companies covered in this report." (That is to say, the analysis may be tainted.) The New York Stock Exchange, meanwhile, has proposed a rule that would bar a stock-market analyst from talking to newspapers that fail to disclose the analyst's conflicts of interest. Even the C.E.O. of Goldman Sachs, one of Wall Street's most discreet firms, has chimed in with a public nostra culpa on behalf of the industry, and has exhorted his peers to restore "trust in our system."

This outbreak of straight talk is Wall Street's way of addressing the collapse of its credibility. Everyone agrees that conflicts of interest riddle the securities and accounting industries—research analysts touting dubious companies to win their business, auditors signing off on dubious numbers to keep it—and that something must be done, so Wall Street has decided to adopt the talking cure. The problem with the conflicts of interest, the argument goes, is that no one knows about them. Fess up, and the problem goes away.

It's a nice thought, but the diagnosis is facile, and the remedy won't work. Start with the central tenet: that during the boom the conflicts of interest were kept secret. The truth is, people knew more than they like to admit. Back in 1998, a *Business Week* cover story called "Wall Street's Spin Game" put the matter succinctly: "The analyst today is an investment banker in sheep's clothing." When Merrill Lynch hired Henry Blodget as an Internet analyst in 1999, the media explained the decision by saying that Blodget, with his rosy predictions, would help the firm bring in more investment-banking business. Jack Grubman, the former Salomon Smith Barney analyst, bragged of his intimate relationship with the companies he was supposed to be evaluating objectively. And the problems in the accounting industry were even more obvious. Though the firms maintained their game face, it was no secret, by the late nineties, that the game itself was rigged. Most investors accepted this state of affairs with the genial tolerance of pro-wrestling fans.

Why? One reason, clearly, was the boom itself—people didn't care why an analyst recommended a stock, as long as it went up. But there was something else: it turns out that people think conflicts of interest don't much matter. "If you disclose a conflict of interest, people in general don't know how to use that information," George Loewenstein, an economics professor at Carnegie Mellon, says. "And, to the extent that they do anything at all, they actually tend to underestimate the severity of these conflicts."



CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Usually, conflicts of interest lead not to corruption but, rather, to unconscious biases. Most analysts try to do good work, but the quid-pro-quo arrangements that govern their business seep into their analyses and warp their judgments. (Warped judgments subvert the market; although even honest analysts have a hard time picking stocks, everyone benefits from the flow of sound information.) "People have a pretty good handle on overt corruption, but they don't have a handle on just how powerful these unconscious biases are," Loewenstein says.

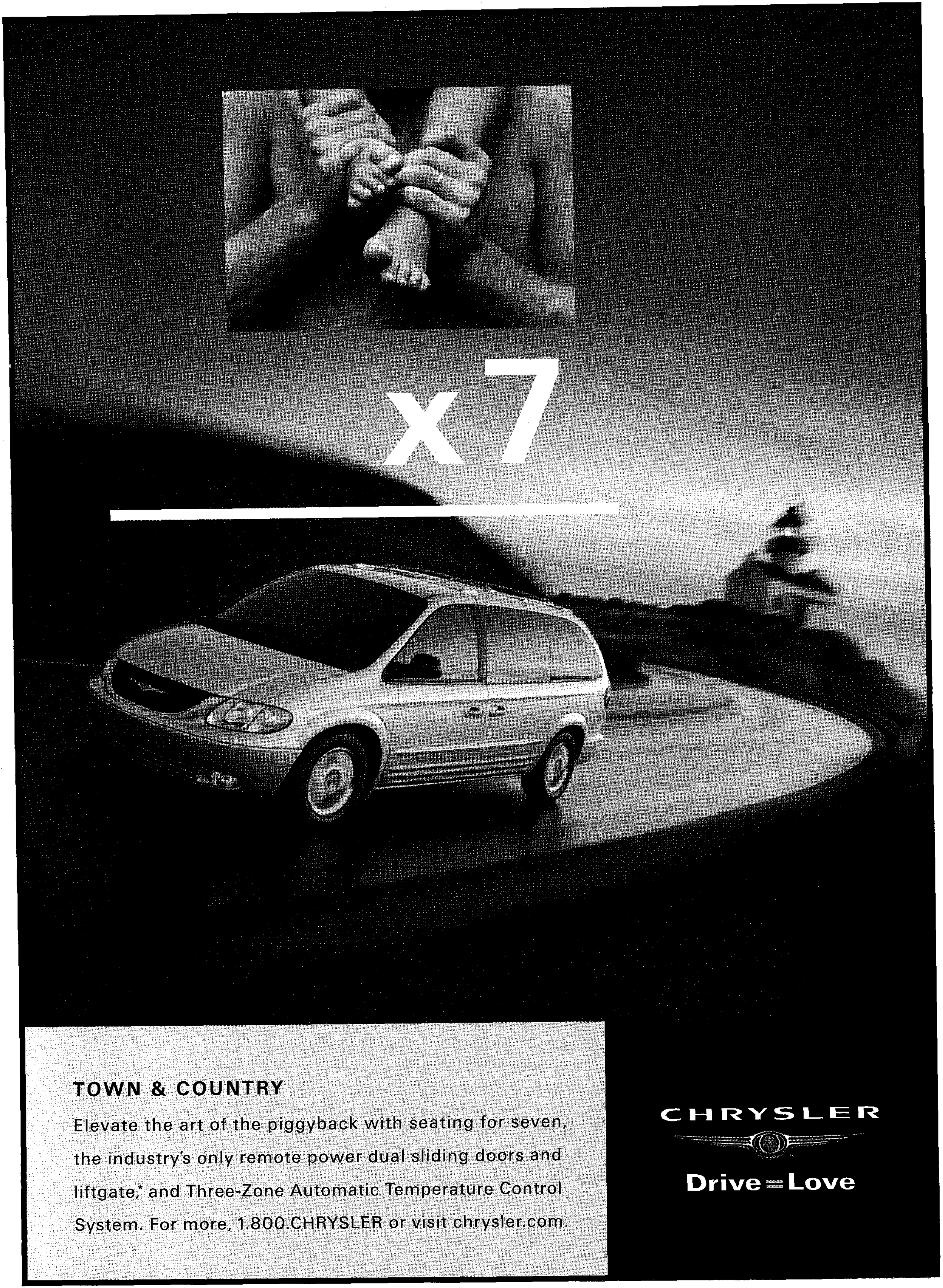
To test the idea, Loewenstein and his colleagues Don Moore and Daylian Cain devised an experiment. One group of people (estimators) were asked to look at several jars of coins from a distance and estimate the value of the coins in each jar. The more accurate their estimates, the more they were paid. Another group of people (advisers) were allowed to get closer to the jars and give the estimators advice. The advisers, however, were paid according to how high the estimators' guesses were. So the advisers had an incentive to give misleading advice. Not surprisingly, when the estimators listened to the advisers their guesses were higher. The remarkable thing was that even when the estimators were told that the advisers had a conflict of interest they didn't care. They continued to guess higher, as though the advice were honest and unbiased. Full disclosure didn't make them any more skeptical.

In the course of the experiment, Loewenstein discovered something even more startling: that disclosure may actually do harm. Once the conflict of interest was disclosed, the advisers' advice got worse. "It's as if people said, 'You know the score, so now anything goes,' " Loewenstein says. Full disclosure, by itself, may have the perverse effect of making analysts and auditors more biased, not less.

Obviously, we shouldn't keep conflicts of interest secret. But revealing them doesn't fix a thing. To restore honesty to analyses and audits, you need to get rid of the conflicts themselves. That means completely separating research from investment banking, as Citigroup did in October, and barring auditors from serving as consultants—and making companies bring in new auditors every few years, as regulators have proposed.

It has become a truism on Wall Street that conflicts of interest are unavoidable. In fact, most of them only seem so, because avoiding them makes it harder to get rich. That's why full disclosure is suddenly so popular: it requires no substantive change. "People are grasping at the straw of disclosure because it allows them to have their cake and eat it, too," Loewenstein says. Transparency is well and good, but accuracy and objectivity are even better. Wall Street doesn't have to keep confessing its sins. It just has to stop committing them.

—*James Surowiecki*



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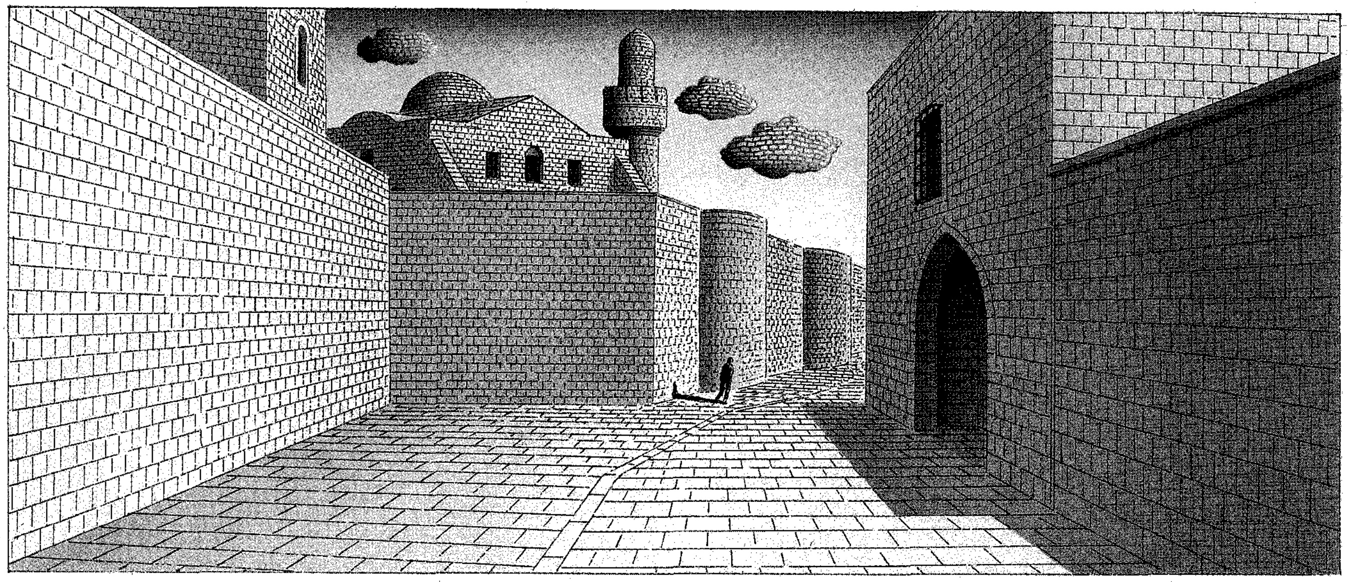
LETTER FROM JERUSALEM

NO MAN'S LAND

The idea of a city disappears.

BY ARI SHAVIT



Friends in Tel Aviv ask me why I stay on in the midst of fanaticism and conflict. It's loyalty, I suppose. Loyalty to lost causes.

GUY BILLOUT

For more than ten years, I have been taking walks along the Gabriel Sherover Promenade, an elegant stone path planted with rosemary and lavender, which was built in 1989 by the philanthropist Gita Sherover in memory of her son. The promenade follows the boundary that divided Jerusalem's Jewish and Arab populations until the Six-Day War, in 1967, and it overlooks the arid white hills of the Judean desert, the Old City, the Temple Mount, the golden Dome of the Rock, and the black dome of Al Aqsa. Bakaa, a middle-class Israeli neighborhood, is half a mile to the west; Talpiot, another middle-class Israeli neighborhood, is half a mile to the south; and Abu Tor, a Muslim community, is a few hundred yards east.

Even after the second intifada broke out, in September of 2000, Jerusalemite Jews and Jerusalemite Arabs shared the public spaces of the promenade—a playground, a kiosk, a gazebo—although they did not often interact. The promenade remained quiet until last autumn, when the kiosk and the gazebo were burned down by Palestinian teen-agers. Then, in the early afternoon of January 11th, three teen-aged gang members from Abu Tor emerged from the southern end of the promenade and stabbed a sixty-four-year-old man from North Talpiot named Henry Weil, who was walking by the gardens.

Weil was lucky—the knife missed his heart by an inch, and he survived. About a month later, on February 8th, the gang attacked Moran Amit, a twenty-five-year-old Hebrew University student who was walking with her boyfriend by the promenade, in a wooded area called the Peace Forest. Armed with knives and tear gas, the boys stabbed her numerous times, and she died within hours. (Her boyfriend escaped unharmed.) Eight Abu Tor teen-agers, arrested in connection with the arson and the stabbings, are in jail, awaiting trial.

Almost no one comes here anymore. When I say I am going for a walk, my family and friends are apprehensive. There is always the question of how far I should go. When does it become irrational? And who is that leather-jacketed guy approaching from the other end?

On a brisk afternoon in early April, Shlomo Aronson, who is Israel's leading landscape architect and who designed the promenade, walked with me. We passed through an olive grove, stopping to look at an ancient aqueduct below and at the charred remains of the gazebo. Aronson, a pensive, soft-spoken man in his mid-sixties, was distressed about what had happened to the promenade.

"For more than a decade, the concept of a cosmopolitan, worldly Jerusalem promenade did work," he said. Until two years ago, one could see black-hatted ultra-Orthodox Jews flying kites with their children, while Palestinian women strolled by in their colorful summer best. "What really gets me is that the attackers came from Abu Tor," Aronson said. "Had they come from one of the refugee camps, I would understand. But they are from here. They grew up here—they are only a bit older than the promenade itself. And they probably used to play here, on the slides and swings. I wonder whether this concept we had of a cosmopolitan, nonreligious Jerusalem was plausible at all. Perhaps it was not. Perhaps it was self-deception. Look at the promenade now—so empty and foreboding. It's a no man's land."

After a few months of relative calm, in Jerusalem if not in the rest of the country, early on the morning of Thursday, November 21st, there was another *pigu'a*—the Hebrew word for a terrorist attack—in the southwest quarter of the city. A bus filled with schoolchildren and commuters exploded. As the news broke, I was on my way to my favorite West Jerusalem café. I felt compelled to rush to the spot to see the carnage, something that, as a journalist, I have done several times over the past year. But then I realized that it would be futile to write another description of yet another infernal scene. Horror has become our routine here. It is almost as if, these days, people in Jerusalem are expected to die gruesome deaths.

So I went to my café and sat at the bar, watching the first live pictures of the explosion appear on the television. It occurred to me that, while people in the West watch basketball games at their local bars, what we watch here is a contest between life and death: the metal shell of the green bus lying by the side of the road, body parts scattered around it, hysterical relatives asking for their loved ones. I followed the changing numbers on the screen: three dead, then five, then eight. Nine, ten, eleven. A sixty-seven-year-old grandmother with her grandson. A forty-four-year-old mother with her son.

The politics of the Jerusalem conflict are ruthlessly simple, almost banal. After victory in the Six-Day War, Israel should not have forcibly occupied the West Bank and Gaza, where millions of Palestinians lived. It shouldn't have encircled Jerusalem with settlements, causing friction and perpetrating injustice. It shouldn't have attempted to unify the city against the will of nearly a third of its residents.

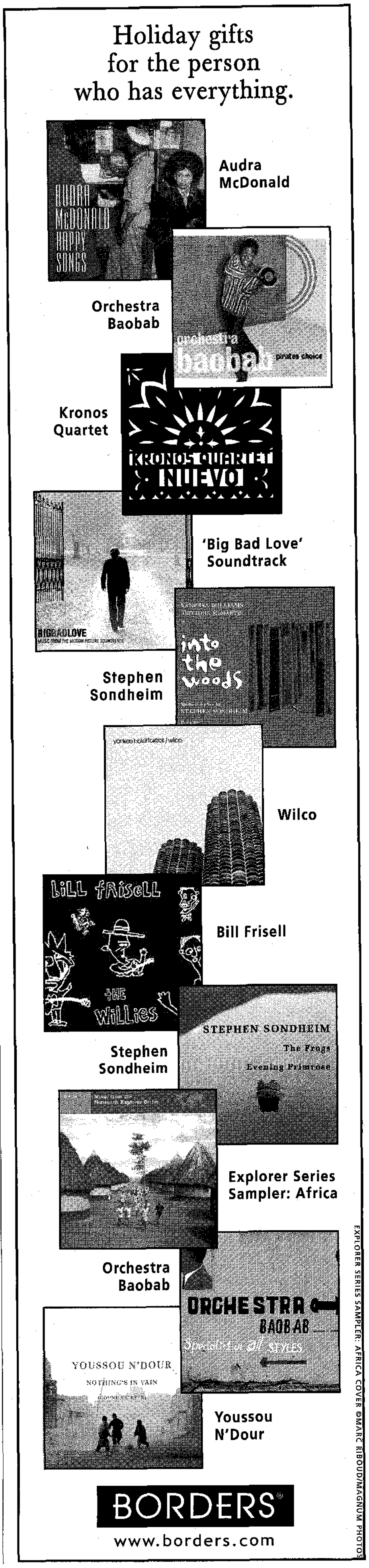
Yet this intifada started a few months after Israel offered to end the occupation, in October, 2000. It began after Ehud Barak, then the Prime Minister, agreed at the Camp David peace summit to dismantle most of the settlements and to accept a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem. This time, the politics of occupation and resistance cannot provide a satisfactory explanation for the bloodshed. Mighty religious and cultural forces are at work, tearing the city apart.

Sheer demographics are endangering the Jewish democratic state. Of the one and a half million people in the Jerusalem metropolitan area, approximately forty per cent are Jews. Of the eight hundred and forty thousand people living just outside the city limits, only twenty-two per cent are Jews. Sixty-eight per cent of the city's six hundred and seventy thousand people are Jews. Among these, the secular population is shrinking fast. Since 1990, more than a hundred and forty thousand Jewish Jerusalemites, most of them young, secular, well-educated professionals, have departed. The remaining secular Jews—university professors, state employees, small-business owners—now constitute less than half the city's population, and a mere fifth of the population of the entire metropolitan area. The people who seem likely to remain are the ultra-religious, the Yeshiva students, and the poor. There is less and less to sustain Jerusalem as a vibrant Western city.

My family was one of the first Jewish families to settle in Talbiyeh, an affluent Palestinian neighborhood in Jerusalem. When my grandparents arrived, in the late nineteen-twenties, they rented rooms in a splendid villa owned by Christian Arabs, right across from where I live today. It is still a pleasant, tree-lined street, one of the most beautiful in Jerusalem.

My great-grandfather Herbert Bentwich, a lawyer from a prominent English Jewish family in Hampstead, first visited Jerusalem in April, 1897, when he was forty years old, on a pilgrimage organized by Thomas Cook Tours. The first World Zionist Congress was about to convene in Basel, and Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, expected my great-grandfather to report on his impressions of the Holy Land. Was Palestine really the land of plenty? My great-grandfather never made it to the congress, but he was mesmerized by the dream that a sovereign Jewish nation would rise again in Zion. He brought up his nine daughters and two sons as Zionists and gave them a proper English education that included Chaucer and Newton and badminton.

When my grandfather, the youngest of the eleven children, turned twenty-two, he came to Palestine with his fiancée, who was born in Jaffa. He left behind Trinity College, Cambridge, and



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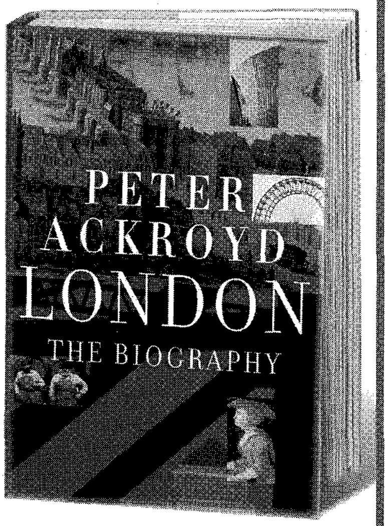

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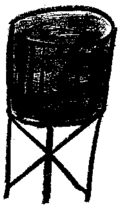
what was to have been a brilliant career in mathematics to become a teacher and then work for the department of education in Jerusalem. My grandparents were part of a movement that believed that here, and only here, could Jews live in peace with their identity and their tortured history.

The British Mandate had begun in 1920, allowing Jews and Arabs to live side by side in Jerusalem under English rule. The mandate lasted for twenty-eight years, and the city flourished. A distinct architectural style of stone-clad buildings evolved, Hebrew University was founded, and a mosaic of different communities developed. But there were occasional upheavals. Toward the end of the summer of 1929, as my grandmother was about to give birth to my mother, a shooting occurred near the villa where they lived in Talbiyeh. Muslims and Jews had disagreed over prayer rights at the Temple Mount, and riots broke out. There were other outbursts between 1936 and 1938, and again in 1946 and 1947. People were killed, and mistrust spread.

By mid-1948, the British were gone. So were the Palestinians of West Jerusalem, including the owners of Talbiyeh's fine villas—my family's landlords and neighbors and friends. They had been scared away by armed Zionists after the Arabs rejected a United Nations partition plan for Palestine. But after the West Jerusalem experiment collapsed the question remained: Can modernity prevail in Jerusalem?



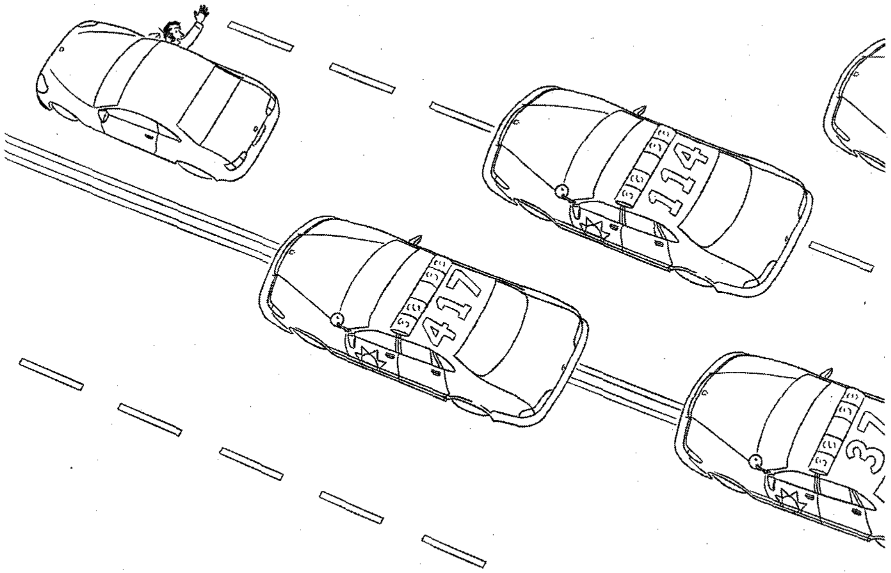
One of my neighbors in Talbiyeh, Marion Brodie, says that this question became urgent even before the suicide bombings. I sat with her one afternoon in her flat as she waited for her eleven-year-old daughter, Sian, to return from school. Marion is forty-five, short-haired, and intense. She moved here from Glasgow twenty years ago, and married Mickey Olles, a Jerusalem-born optometrist. She was enchanted with the city's village-like feel and its rich history. But these days it is too risky to visit the Dome of the Rock, the Western Wall, or the Temple Mount.

On a Saturday night last March, Marion's extended family went to see a ballet recital at the Music Academy. Afterward, Marion suggested that they all go out for ice cream at a nearby café called Moment, which is less than sixty yards from the Prime Minister's residence. But Marion's brother said that it was late, he was tired, there was school tomorrow. "Unwillingly, I conceded," she told me. "Half an hour later, a bomb went off. Sian heard the blast in bed." Moment had been bombed and eleven people were dead. The next day, Sian asked to see the place. Marion hesitated, but Sian was determined. "So I took her to what remained of our neighborhood café, and we stood there together and hugged, and she started crying. And all the way home, and when we got home, she wouldn't stop crying. For more than an hour, she wouldn't stop."

About that time, Sian started waking up at night. "It never happened before," Marion said. "But now every night she wakes up and comes to us and says she is scared. And she is asking about her passport. Does she have a foreign passport? she asks. And if there are no bombings in Scotland, perhaps we should move there. Perhaps the three of us should go there and make new friends and start a new life."

Until very recently, Marion was still shopping at the souk in the increasingly dangerous Jewish quarter of Jerusalem. The market—the spice stores, the smells, the people she has known for nearly twenty years—is the last bastion of things she loves about the city. "Although my friends think I'm crazy, I insist on taking my shopping cart every Thursday morning down into the alleys. But last Thursday I suddenly saw bits of bodies everywhere. It wasn't a premonition—it was rational. I could see it coming, and I felt myself blown up. I really felt it—the burning hands, the skin peeling off. And I heard the phone calls afterward. I saw Mickey and Sian sobbing at my grave. I took my empty cart and turned around and left. A day later, a suicide bomber exploded right there."

The King David Hotel, overlooking the Old City, was opened to the public in January, 1931. One of the few outstanding hotels in the Middle East, and Israel's only grand hotel



"Mom, turn on the TV!"

• •

for more than half a century, the King David has become a seismograph for the region.

My cousin Gideon Avrami spent ten years at the King David in a variety of jobs—as a security officer, as a chef, and, finally, as managing director. He is a tall, solid man in his early forties, who has three children.

In September, 1993, the Oslo Accords were signed and there was general euphoria. In 1994 and 1995, Avrami told me, you could actually see a new Middle East taking shape just by walking through the lobby. There were guests from the Gulf States in gold-embroidered gowns, and Hashemite guests in their red-white-and-black kaffiyehs, and C.E.O.s from almost every multinational corporation—Sony, Nokia, Mercedes.

On November 4, 1995, dozens of heads of state attending the funeral of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stayed at the hotel: King Hussein of Jordan, President Mubarak of Egypt, former United States Presidents Bush and Carter, and many of the European leaders. Prince Charles had to take a junior suite that night, because Bill and Hillary Clinton had already reserved the royal one. It was the last time a group like this would assemble in the hotel.

Three months later, in early 1996, there was a series of bus bombings, and business fell off, but by the late nineties the climate had improved. When Barak took power, in 2000, peace seemed to be within reach. "There was a real sense of splurging again," Avrami told me. "The annual occupancy rate was eighty-five per cent. There were exquisite flower arrangements in every room and three sorts of caviar at the breakfast buffet and gourmet dinners at La Régence and lavish sunset banquets by the garden pool."

Violence erupted at the end of September, with no warning. After Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount, a site holy to both Jews and Muslims, Palestinians rioted throughout the country, and within days fifty people were dead. The second intifada had begun. Over the next year, suicide bombings became a regular, if unpredictable, occurrence. "On some nights, the hotel was so empty it felt like a haunted mansion," Avrami said. By mid-December, occupancy was down to fifteen per cent. Gone were the flower arrangements, the breakfast caviar, the butler department, and the old concierge. La Régence closed the following fall. "Most difficult of all was letting the staff go, because what made the King David was its employees, many of whom had been there for thirty and forty years, and many of whom were Palestinian," Avrami said. "So at first I fired only a hundred and fifty out of four hundred

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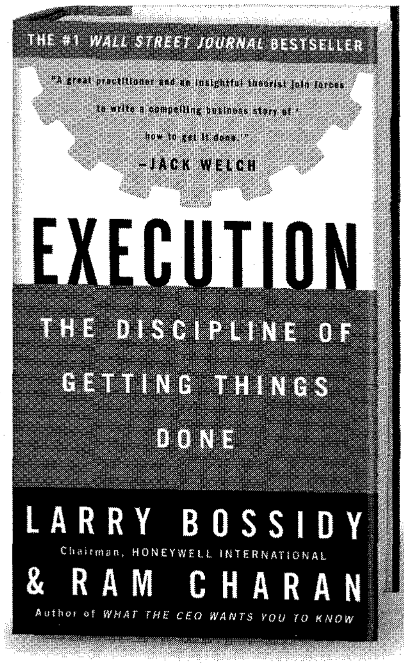

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and fifty devoted men and women. Then I fired another hundred and fifty. Then the board fired me."

Three border guards with automatic weapons patrolled the streets outside Gilly's Bistro, in downtown Jerusalem, when I went there last spring. Opened in 1989 by Gilly Fefferman, the restaurant served steak and good wine, and was at one time the favorite destination of the city's secular upper-middle class.

"The year 2000 was fantastic," Fefferman, a reedy, bespectacled man, said as he crossed the arched hall of his whitewashed restaurant. "People were eating and drinking and being merry, bringing profits to an all-time high. But then came our own 9/11—which preceded New York's by a year—and within a month business was halved." When the suicide bombings began and the city center collapsed altogether, business at the restaurant dropped by ninety per cent. "Friday night, we had four for dinner, yesterday three, today you are the only one. So two weeks ago I said to my wife, 'Enough is enough—I'm closing.' I feel like hell about it, but I'm closing. Next month, I won't be here."

Across the square is Isabelle, a bar owned by the same people who owned Moment. It has become a haven for many of Moment's survivors and former customers. The night I was there, a month after the bombing, Isabelle was the only bar downtown that was not ghostly empty. Outside was high alert and deep fear and foggy dark, but inside there wasn't a free barstool. "The instant before sleep, it'll always come back," Keren Elisar, who had been a bartender at Moment, said. "The step I took away from the bar for some unknown reason. Then the sound of breaking glass. The quiet. Then the horrific screaming of people dying. And Yoram Cohen, the owner, putting a hand over my eyes so I wouldn't see the torn-apart bodies. So I wouldn't see the human parts on the bar floor. And the feeling of cataclysm. As if it's all over—Moment, Jerusalem, our lives. As if the end is here."

"There were four still customers sitting by the bar," Yoram Cohen said. "So handsome they were, leaning calmly back on their barstools with their eyes wide open. As if holding on to the taste of the beer they just had. As if not yet grasping the blast that just killed them." Cohen learned from Israeli intelligence sources that a suicide bomber had been sent to Isabelle earlier this year, but was intercepted.

There is a ritual at Isabelle, and it was performed the night I was there. "Put on the *pigu'a* song!" people shouted. The barman, who was bald and tattooed, put on the Hebrew rock ballad that was playing when the bomb went off.

I looked around. The patrons of Isabelle were dancing.

Whenever I go to Tel Aviv to visit friends and colleagues, they ask, When are you leaving? Why are you still there? What keeps you among the ultra-Orthodox Jews and the Arabs? I, too, wonder why I stay in these arid hills, in the midst of fanaticism and conflict. It's loyalty, I suppose. Loyalty to lost causes. Loyalty to what was and what could have been. To the unique encounter that was Jerusalem.

This loyalty might one day dissolve. In every one of us here in Jerusalem, something buckles with each new scene of carnage. But, for the time being, amid the shootings and the explosions, I cling to the idea of the Jerusalem that my family came for and to the hope that it will someday be possible.

In May, Gilly Fefferman closed his bistro and moved to Tel Aviv. Gideon Avrami became the managing director of Tel Aviv's Azrieli skyscrapers, which have been threatened by Al Qaeda-like attacks. Yoram Cohen rebuilt Moment, but discovered that customers are slow to come back. People are cautiously returning to the promenade, and Shlomo Aronson is less despairing than he was in April. Marion Brodie and her family are still undecided. And I have noticed that of the twenty children and grandchildren that my grandparents had after they arrived in Jerusalem, seventy-five years ago, I am the only one still here. ♦

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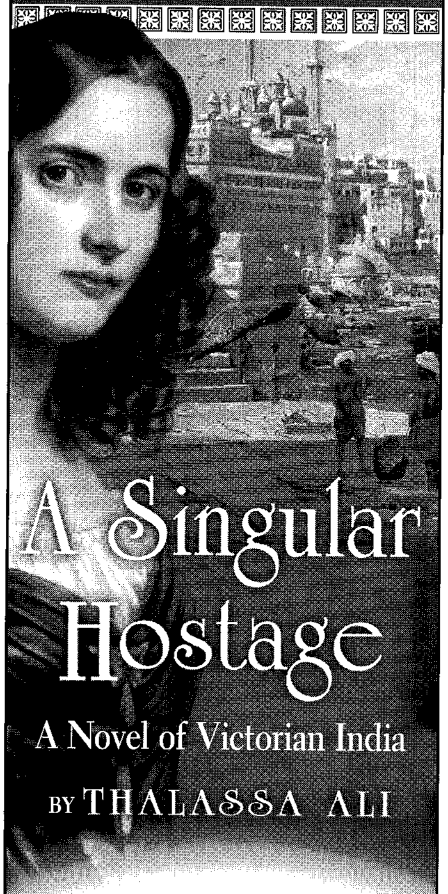

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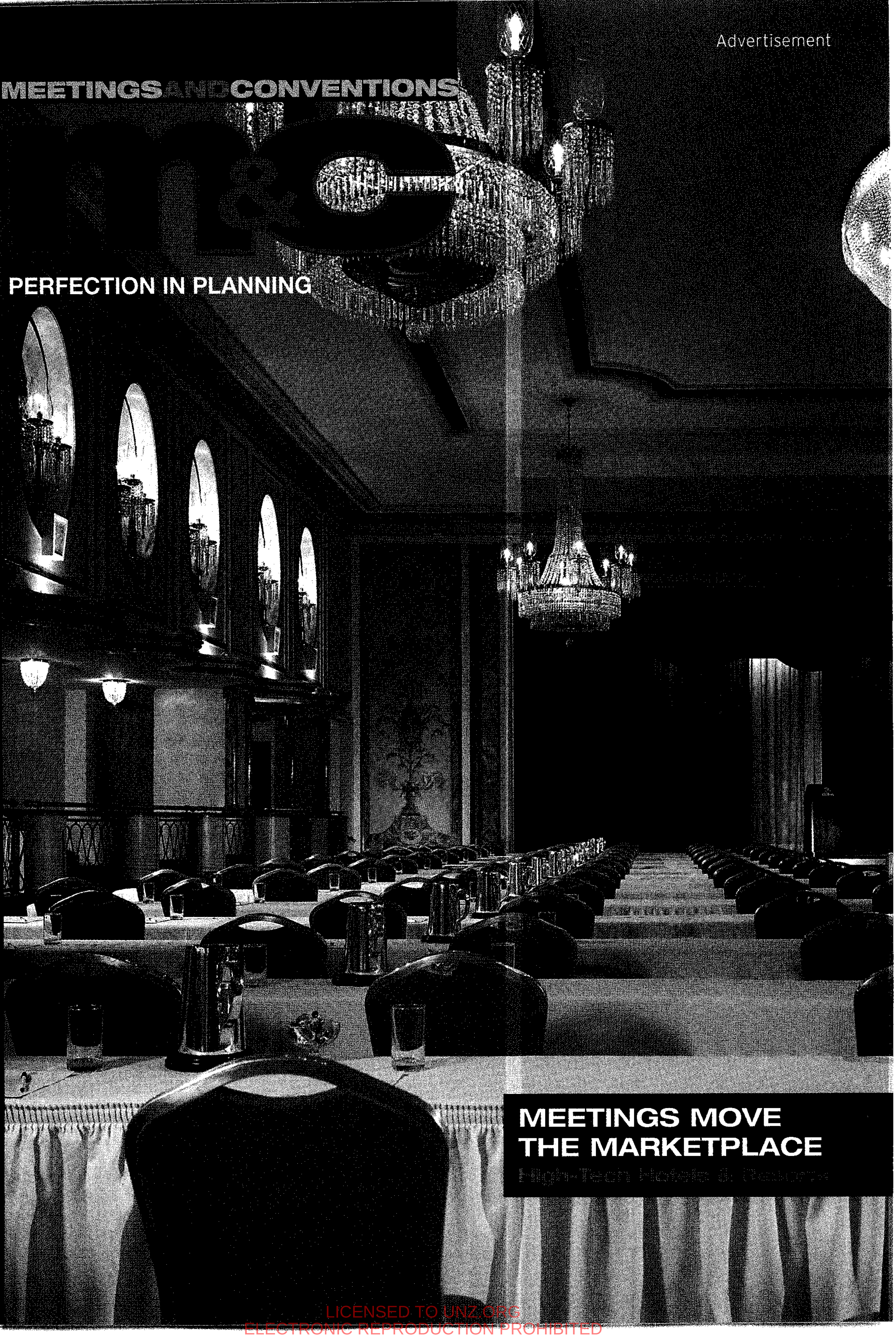

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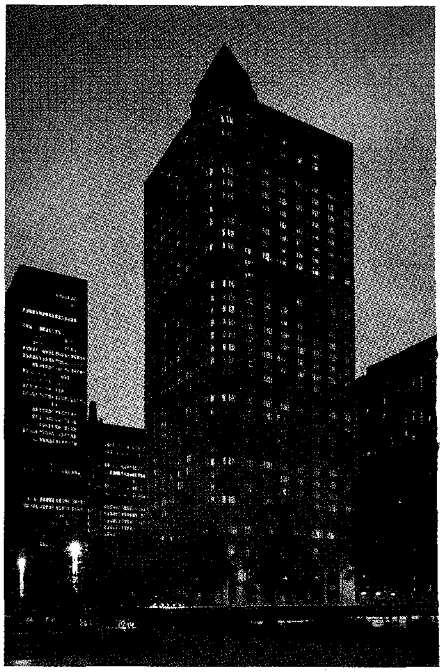

Cover: Totaling a hundred-thirty-thousand square feet, the newly renovated Hilton New York is made for meetings and exhibitions. Its new rooms boast the latest technology, including a video-conferencing facility.

Clockwise: The Doubletree Guest Suites Times Square New York City provides two meeting rooms and the only all-suite hotel in Times Square; The Mobil Four-Star and AAA Four-Diamond Fairmont Chicago features more than sixty-thousand square feet of meeting, conference, and banquet space; New York City's Plaza Hotel has long been the preferred meeting place for the most famous names in finance, industry, and the arts.

by Cheryl-Anne Sturken

The air crackles with mouse clicks, keyboard clatter, a symphony of cell phones and on-line messaging, all resounding in a grand cacophony of communications. It's the soundtrack to America's information-driven world, where staying connected—to customer needs, market conditions and breaking news—can mean the difference between announcing a downsizing or celebrating an expansion.

Make no mistake: today's business force is wired. According to an October 2002 survey by American Express of fourteen hundred hard-core business travellers (making an average of 8.5 trips per year), seventy-one per cent access the Web or check their E-mail daily; one in five check their E-mail three or more times each day.

While the face-to-face conduct of commerce remains essential even in the Internet Age, any moment spent out of the office can be a liability, say road warriors, unless travellers are equipped with plug-in options. And that means hotels have to measure up.

MEETINGS GO HIGH-TECH

Whether rolling out a product demonstration or pulling off simultaneous training sessions, meeting planners are relying on technology to support their programs.

The company connection. "Everybody wants to do live demonstrations from their company Web sites to the meeting room," says Sharon Marsh, who oversees fifty meetings annually as manager of internal events for Pleasanton, CA-based software giant PeopleSoft. "We need to be able to come into a hotel and install direct connections straight into our company's network."

Make mine wireless. "My people need to be plugged in," says Dana Sargent, group manager for Overland Park, KS-based Sprint. "If hotels don't have full wireless capability, then they should at least consider having an Internet café where business travellers can go between meetings to catch up on what's going on back at the office."

E-mail bonding. "We live on E-mail," says Michelle Snock, manager of meetings and events for San Jose, CA-based Cisco Systems Inc. "For our last meeting, we had the foyer and dining rooms outfitted with wireless capability, just so our people could check their E-mail without racing back to their guest rooms to plug in. If you don't have high-speed lines, we won't stay with you."

Wired guest rooms. "You need the ability to set up your office away from your office, because you have to respond back to customers immediately," says Steven Smith, manager of customer sales events nationwide for Irving, TX-based Verizon. "When I get to my room, I need two phone lines: one to check E-mail and one to make calls."

> Make no mistake:
> today's business force is wired.

HOTELS RESPOND

"In the last six to eight months, the need for hotels to offer wireless technology has developed quickly," says Robert Bansfield, assistant vice president of information technology for Hyatt Hotels Corp. "Customers tell us they need it, want it, and are

Cover: courtesy of Hilton Hotels; *this page clockwise:* courtesy of Hilton Hotels; Fairmont Hotels & Resorts

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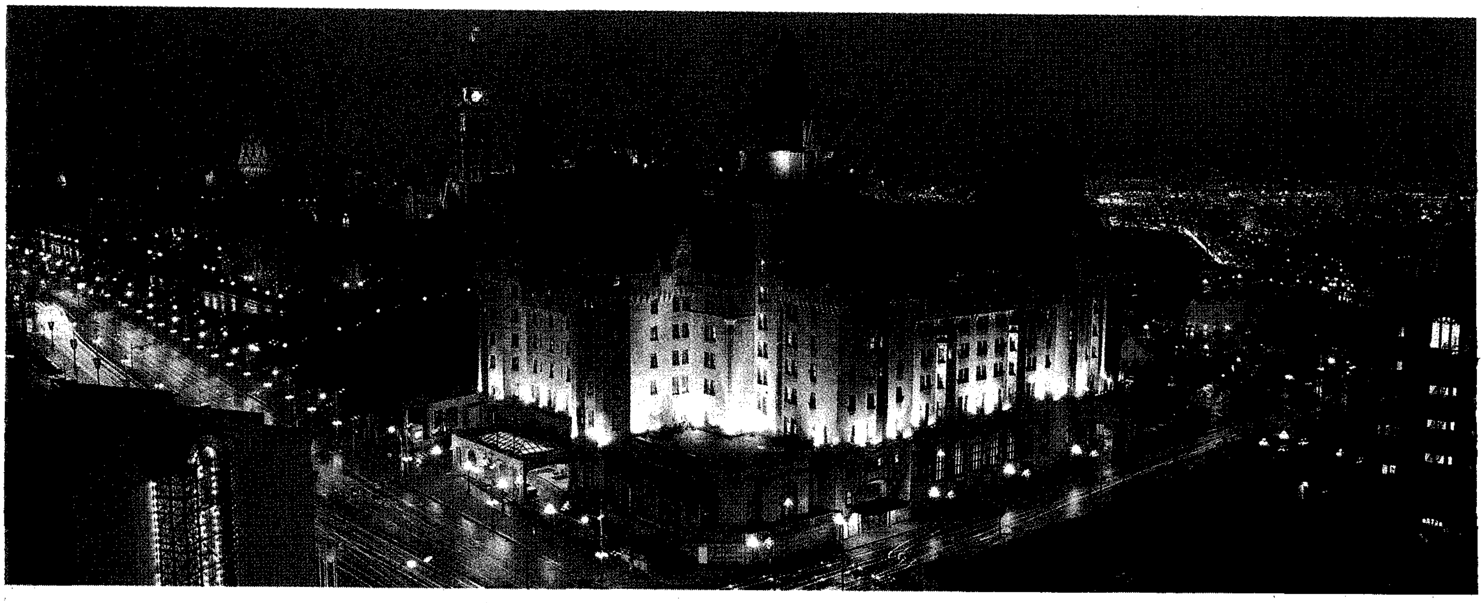
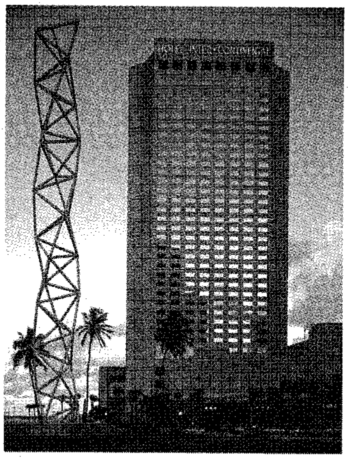
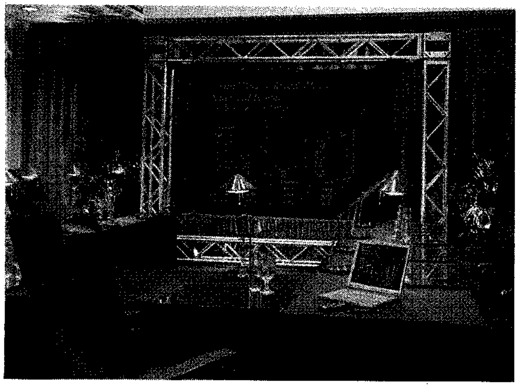






Top: The Fairmont Château Laurier in Ottawa combines meeting planning services, unsurpassed facilities, and wireless high-speed Internet access; *Center:* InterContinental Miami's twenty-six meeting and conference rooms provide more than sixty-five-thousand square feet of meeting, exhibition, and banquet space; *Above:* The Hyatt Regency Houston has a sixteen-thousand square-foot Imperial Ballroom and a spacious twenty-eight-thousand square-foot Exhibit Hall.

Top: courtesy of Fairmont Hotels & Resorts; *middle:* courtesy of InterContinental Hotels; *bottom:* courtesy of Hyatt Hotels Corp

basing their booking decisions on that service."

Indeed, many top-flight hotel chains are making major commitments to develop and improve their tech offerings. Earlier this year, for example, Atlanta-based Six Continents Hotels partnered with Verizon to provide an integrated entertainment and high-speed Internet access system in guest rooms at the company's InterContinental The Barclay New York. "We provide high-definition TVs with desktop quality resolution, digital channels and wireless keyboards," says Steve Porter, president, the Americas, for Six Continents. "These are ways we add value to the guest experience." In addition, InterContinental's new Insider Concierge program allows guests to log on to the chain's Web site to create personal itineraries, from "visiting" attractions to making dinner reservations.

Putting their money where their mouse is. By year's-end, Beverly Hills-based Hilton Hotels Corp. estimates it will have spent $122 million on technology in 2002 alone and has earmarked $135 million more for 2003. "We now have one platform, and that is to have technology consistency across all our brands, whether they are corporate-owned, managed, or franchised," says Tim Harvey, senior vice president and chief information officer.

Likewise, Chicago-based Hyatt and Toronto-based Fairmont Hotels & Resorts have pledged significant dollars to invest in tech resources throughout their portfolios. Hyatt estimates it will double its current spending on technology in 2003. And Fairmont expects to continue investing heavily in technology enhancements for the next several years, much of it targeted to support several new property acquisitions. "We have wired all of the meeting rooms in all of our hotels," says Thomas Storey, Fairmont's executive vice president of business development and strategy. The wiring of guest rooms is proceeding apace, Storey adds, and most will be Internet-ready by the end of the year.

ON THE HORIZON

- In new properties, like the twelve-hundred-room Hilton Americas-Houston, scheduled to open in the third quarter of 2003, front-desk staff will have wireless capability, allowing them the freedom to come out from behind the desk to welcome and check in guests.
- InterContinental Hotels & Resorts has begun testing wireless curbside check-in, allowing guests to bypass the lobby altogether.

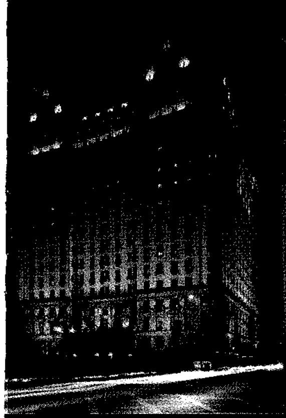
> The next big technology rush after wireless will be live voice-video.

- Looking ahead even further, Hilton is making plans to gear up for the next big technology rush after wireless: live voice-video over IT lines. Tech-savvy guests will be able to flip open their laptops, connect to the Internet, and place private phone calls with video accompaniment.

On-site support. A hotel might sport all the right bells and whistles, but when there is a lack of sufficient on-site tech support, the presentation—and the hotel's reputation—risk coming to ruin.

To that end, InterContinental announced several new services this past September to entice working travellers, including in-room business centers with dual phone lines and twenty-four-hour technology support.

According to Robert Bansfield at Hyatt, it's no accident that properties such as the Grand Hyatt



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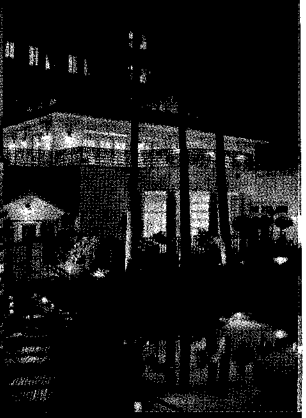

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Seattle and the Hyatt Regency San Francisco Airport report more than triple the industry norm of guest usage of high-tech services over the past year. "One of the things that drives usage higher is the hotel staff being educated in technology," he says. "At Hyatt this is a top priority."

In July 2002, Fairmont launched its own twenty-four-hour technical support hotline, manned by its in-house IT department. "More than fifty per cent of our customers use the network for real business purposes. They are on-line for hours, not just minutes," says Tim Aubrey, vice president of technology for the chain.

"We have to take direct responsibility for delivering and supporting our guests' technology needs," Aubrey adds, reiterating a clarion call being echoed across the hospitality industry.

(Cheryl-Anne Sturken is Senior Editor of Meetings & Conventions *magazine.)*

Top: Facilities at Chicago's Hyatt Regency McCormick Place Conference Center include the PCMA Learning Center and two seven-hundred square-foot boardrooms; *Above:* InterContinental Resort & Casino San Juan offers the climate and natural beauty of Puerto Rico, as well as thirteen meeting rooms that can accommodate up to six-hundred guests.

Top: courtesy of Hyatt Hotels Corp.; *bottom:* courtesy of InterContinental Hotels

MEETING GOALS

The Powerful HelmsBriscoe Advantage

In just ten years, HelmsBriscoe has emerged as a powerful force that has redefined how the business of meetings is conducted. It is now the hospitality industry's largest site-selection firm. Like many inspired ideas in commerce, the concept behind the company was breathtakingly straightforward. While other industries realized the enormous financial benefits of group purchasing and centralized buying, the meeting planning and hospitality industry had yet to test the waters.

Founder Roger T. Helms first saw the opportunity during an economic slowdown, as corporations downsized their meeting departments. Helms realized the remaining meeting planners could use some help with the labor-intensive process of finding appropriate meeting sites. He offered to provide this useful service at no charge to the companies, knowing that his hotel friends would pay a replacement fee for the newfound business.

"It's essentially a win-win proposition for everybody," notes Helms. "Though we are one-hundred per cent client-driven, our strong partnerships with hotels make us an important strategic client to them at the same time." A knowledgeable staff is the key to HelmsBriscoe's relationship with both clients and hotels. Clients benefit from each associate's intimate knowledge of the dynamics of the hospitality industry and of the broad range of properties available. Hotels benefit from a relationship with a partner that fully understands their business—an enterprise that not only brings them bookings but also communicates with them in a language they understand.

The typical HelmsBriscoe transaction is swift and seamless. A client initiates the contact with a request for a future meeting. HelmsBriscoe assembles a quick profile of the meeting specifications and then taps into its broad range of resources and contacts with hotels. A list of options is usually available within forty-eight hours. Once a property is selected, HelmsBriscoe coördinates the contract process and is compensated by the hotel that is ultimately booked.

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As business has grown, HelmsBriscoe's clients have sought additional services from the firm. ResourceOne, a subsidiary of the company, offers a full range of meeting planning resources, including registration, on-site management, and full accounting services. HelmsBriscoe has also expanded its relationship to hotels with the creation of Performance International, a specialized consulting firm assisting hotel and resort companies with everything from recruitment to technology.

HelmsBriscoe has definitely met a crucial need in the marketplace. The best evidence of this is demonstrated by a question Helms frequently fields from new clients. After a brief profile of what his firm can do for them, he's often asked, "You mean there is a company that does that?" His answer is yes, and based on their swift growth, HelmsBriscoe does it very well.

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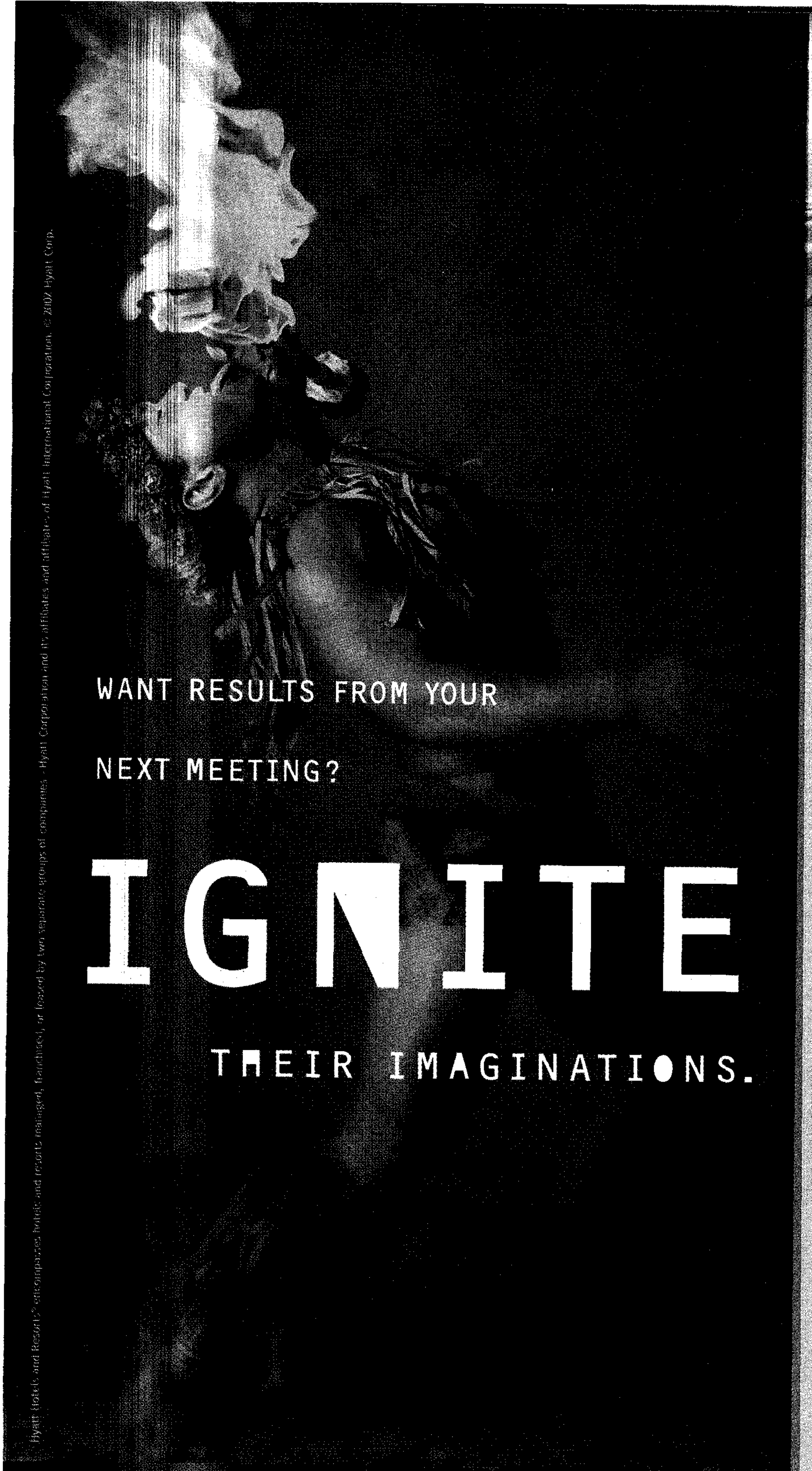
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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

POINTE COUNTERPOINTE

Ballerinas wage a backstage battle over the proper toe shoe.

BY KEVIN CONLEY

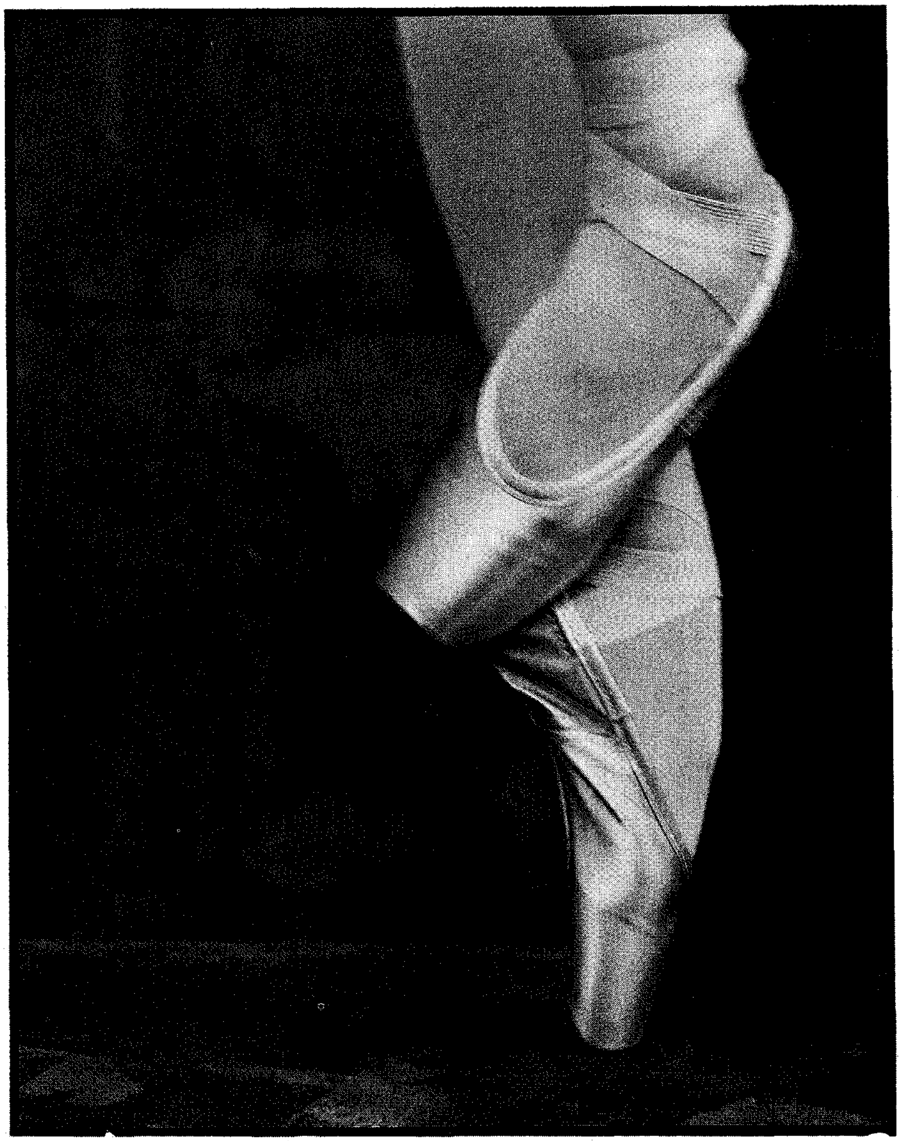
Onstage, the ballerina is an ethereal creature, balancing on the inch-wide platform of her pointe shoe. Backstage, she's a stock clerk, seamstress, blacksmith, and wrecking crew. Maintaining the central illusion of ballet—that women don't walk, they waft—takes a lot of work and a lot of shoes. The average, traditional pointe shoe, a Capezio or a Freed of London, is mostly handmade, still created in the painstaking way it was in Anna Pavlova's day: out of satin, cotton, flour, water, and not much else. One pair of toe shoes costs sixty dollars and lasts about an hour. New York City Ballet spends half a million dollars a year on them.

The shoes are not just expensive; they're high-maintenance. At City Ballet, each dancer wears out about a hundred and thirty pairs a year, so the dancers spend a lot of time sorting through weekly shipments, accepting and rejecting them shoe by shoe. After they've chosen their stock, all the dancers, even the principals, must sew on their own ribbons, which crisscross prettily up the ankle and hold the shoe on the foot. Even before putting the shoes on, they start breaking them in. First, they crack the hard leather shank (which supports the flexed arch of the foot when a dancer is on pointe) to make it pliable. Then they take a farrier's rasp to the leather sole to give it some grip. To soften up the hard box of the toe, they crush it underfoot or slam a door on it—a softened box helps the movement of the foot appear "more articulate." Then they bang the points on a concrete wall for a few minutes, which deadens the racket the shoes make on the stage floor and allows the dancers to flit more quietly, an important trait in the sylphs and ghosts they often portray. The actual noise reduction is small but worth the effort. As one shoemaker said, "It turns it from clappity-clap-clap to thunkity-thunk-thunk."

Finally, the shoes are ready to wear. The lucky dancers—the ones with what shoe fitters call "peasant" or "Giselle" feet (the first three toes all the same length)—can just slip them over their tights and go onstage. But most dancers—who have "Grecian" or "Egyptian" feet—must add either traditional cushioning, such as lamb's wool or paper towelling, or a more recent product: an Ouch Pouch, Second Skin, a gel pad, a toe spacer or two.

Despite such precautions, the foot-and-ankle area is still the ballerina's primary trouble spot, prone, like a pitcher's shoulder or a running back's knees, to a whole syndrome of injuries: ligament tears, tendinitis, stress fractures, and bone spurs. Even minor complaints—a split toenail, a blister, a corn—can disable a pointe dancer, though many perform through the pain. According to Garielle Whittle, who teaches beginning pointe class at the School of American Ballet, it's a lesson that young ballet dancers absorb from the first day. "Of course, you do have to stop if you're in great pain," she says. "And they know that. But they really persevere, even when they're hurting a bit. At eleven or twelve, that's saying a lot."

In the past few years, however, some dancers have started performing in a new shoe, the Gaynor Minden—pink satin on the outside, but with Nike-style high-tech innards designed to protect



Breaking with tradition: A.B.T.'s Maria Riccetto. Photograph by Ruven Afanador.

the feet. The shoes are quiet. They save companies money: a pair costs twenty dollars more than the traditional shoes but lasts five times longer. They have thin inner and outer linings made of shock-absorbent urethane foam, to ease discomfort and cut down on injuries. And they don't have to be broken in: Maria Riccetto, one of six American Ballet Theatre dancers to use them, calls them "sew and go." If you're determined to stand on tiptoe for hours on end, they're sensible shoes.

But in the ballet world it can be a mark of distinction that something hasn't changed since the days of the tsars, and this newcomer shoe has kicked off a war. Balletomanes may not know about it, though, because it's a backstage sort of war, fought with snubs and sarcasm and unstoppable ladylike will. And it's not simply a matter of aesthetics; there are major dance-company toe-shoe budgets at stake, and a nation of little snowflakes and sugarplum fairies who all need shoes.

Of course, both factions believe that George Balanchine is on their side, and both have former Balanchine dancers who are willing to do battle. Suki Schorer, a teacher at S.A.B. and the author of "Suki Schorer on Balanchine Technique," dismissed Gaynor Minden's claims of injury reductions, saying, "Ballet isn't about health. It's an art form." Gillian Murphy, a star at American Ballet Theatre and the first dancer in a New York company to perform in Gaynor Mindens, said that Schorer approached her once in class and asked, "Why do you wear those space-age shoes?"

When this comment got back to Melissa Hayden, Murphy's mentor at the North Carolina School of the Arts and a former City Ballet principal (as Schorer was), she was appalled: "How can Suki Schorer make that statement when she's never worn the shoe? The shoe looks gorgeous on her foot. Excuse me. Excuse me! Suki"—Hayden, who knows better, pronounced it "Sucky"—"seems to be the Official Person Who Knows About Balanchine Technique. I don't know who gave her that title."

At the Capezio factory—part of a sprawling former munitions plant cum bomb shelter in Fairlawn, New Jersey—Daniel Terlizzi, a company director, picks up a pearl-handled shoemaker's knife. It's small and paisley-shaped, and the blade fits just under the index finger, so you can't see the knife at all as Terlizzi guides it over layers of pink satin and cotton lining. He cuts smoothly along the special-order pattern—this one's for Rachel Rutherford, at City Ballet—and the pink satin gives like skin, as if the finger were performing surgery. "Very difficult shoe to make," Terlizzi says. "Most difficult shoe—period. Everything else is pie compared to this."

Each shoemaker has an individual style, and dancers can tell the difference. Terlizzi knows this because he tried fooling one, and got caught. "Because when I first started, I didn't believe it," he said. "I was, like, 'Come *on!*' So one of our guys was out, and the girl put in an order and I said, 'Have so-and-so make it and let's see.' He made them. She sent them back. And from then on I never did it again."

Terlizzi is the great-grandnephew of Salvatore Capezio, who started the business in 1887, at Broadway and Thirty-ninth Street, across from the old Metropolitan Opera House. The company, which had moved production out of New York by 1980, now makes all manner of dance shoes and custom figure skates, but the toe-shoe division is its most labor-intensive.

Apparently, shoemaking is a profession you stick with—many of the Capezio employees have watched Terlizzi, who is in his mid-thirties, grow from a kid exploring the bomb-shelter tunnels into their chatty boss. He wanders across the factory floor, past dangerous early-industrial machinery—embossers, a channelling machine, swing-headed beam-cutters—happily telling horror stories about die-cutters and sliced thumbs. ("So I wrapped him and his thumb in my shirt and drove straight to the hospital.") He follows the fabric pieces through the fitting room, where seamstresses from Serbia and Bosnia sew and stack the satin, and into the lasting room, where the shank, the sole, and the fabric body all come together.

At the first big table in the lasting room, a woman spreads out the fabric and starts working on the toe box, slathering paste on every frail layer of fabric in the shoe—change a few ingredients, and she could be making baklava. The gluey layers of satin and cotton are fitted snugly around the last—or, for special orders, plastic models of the dancer's foot—then they're pleated and lockstitched to the sole by another hazardous-duty machine, this one equipped with rapid-chomping fishhook-like needles. ("One mistake and it gets your finger," Terlizzi says. "It happens to a lot of guys.")

Two things make toe-shoe manufacture especially difficult. First, the lockstitching has to be hidden in a channel cut inside the sole, so none of it shows or touches the stage. There's an aesthetic reason for this (the seamless sole looks more like a bare foot) as well as a practical one (the smooth surface works like a bare foot, too), but it's a real piece of shoemaking magic. For the trick to work, the shoe has to be built inside out, then removed from the last and turned only after it's fully assembled. And all this dangerous, delicate work—the pleating and stitching and turning—must be done quickly, while the gluey layers are still malleable.

Once the shoe has been machine-stitched, the maker steps in and begins to work, turning the shoe right side out, placing it back on the last, and shaping the toe box before the paste begins to harden. He pounds the box lightly and quickly with a hammer, as if he were polishing it. He smoothes the front of the box (the vamp) and shapes the sides (the wings), creating a trademark blend of thinness and balance and structural grip that the dancer recognizes immediately and, as she grows in skill through years of performance, comes to experience as her own.

"I had Maker 17," says Merrill Ashley, a former City Ballet principal and one of the few ballerinas I spoke to who had visited Capezio to "meet her maker." "Philly was his name. And he retired right before I did. I thought, Maybe this is a hint. I can't get used to another maker. It's like changing hus-

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Henri Matisse. Self-Portrait. 1906. Oil on canvas.
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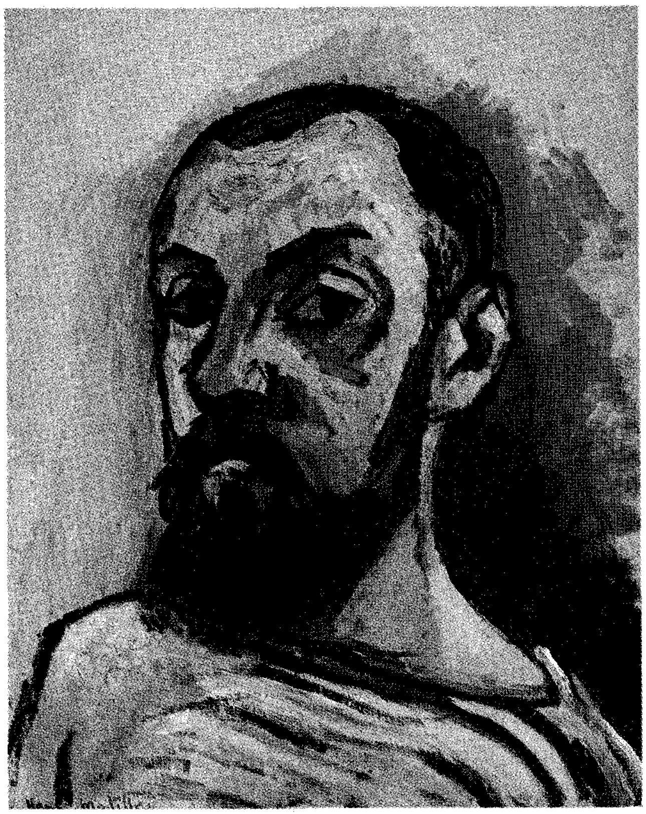

Henri Matisse. *Self-Portrait.* 1906.

Pablo Picasso. Self-Portrait with Palette. 1906. Oil on canvas.
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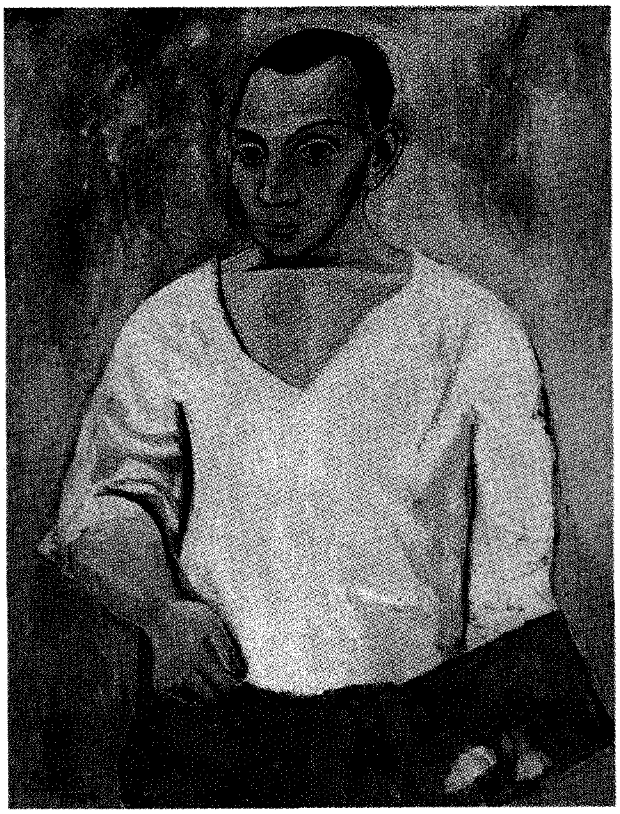

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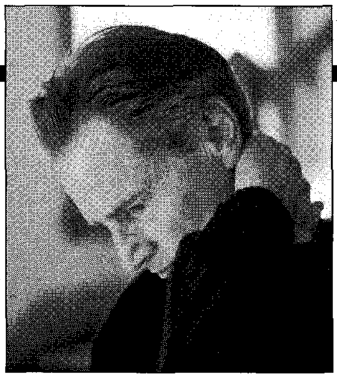

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"His mastery as a short story writer reflects his gifts as both playwright and actor...but what lassoes the reader is the tension between Shepard's acuity and tenderness."
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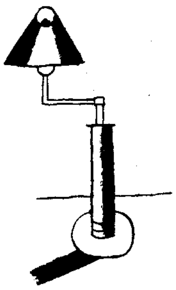
Photo: Brigitte Lacombe

bands. It's . . ." She paused, before alighting on the right word. "It's you!"

Finally, the maker pounds and shapes the platform, the hard oval bottom of the toe box which the ballerina will balance on. To help create this balance, each toe shoe is symmetrical (there is no right or left shoe), but the balance in each maker's shoe still has an idiosyncratic, handmade feel. Some makers fashion a rounder platform, so the dancer can subtly dictate the balance point with her own movement—she tells the shoe what to do. Others make the platform flatter, thereby dictating the balance point—to help keep her where she wants to be. When the maker is satisfied with his work, he puts it to a final test, setting the toe shoe on pointe on his cobbler's bench. For an instant, it balances in front of him for a quick solo. Then he puts it on a rack for the drying room and takes his hammer to the next in line.

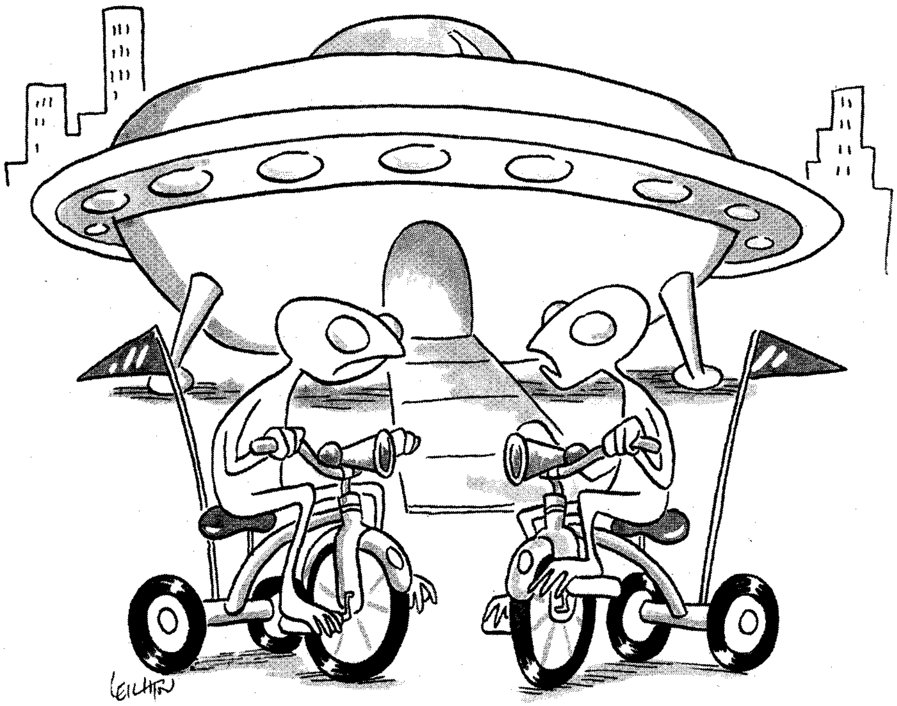
Eliza Minden, forty-three, a mild-mannered black belt and the inventor of the Gaynor Minden shoe, is the latest name to be added to the long and intertwined history of ballet and ladies' footwear. The connections begin with the woman who is credited with organizing the first *ballet de cour,* Catherine de Médicis, the granddaughter of Lorenzo the Magnificent and the wife of Henry II, King of France; Catherine also appears to be the first woman to have shown up at a party in high heels. (She was extremely short but knew a good Italian shoemaker.) Two centuries later, the dancer Marie-Anne de Cupis de Camargo became famous for cutting off the high heels that had become standard dance equipment, and for managing to pull off an entrechat quatre, the speedy scissor jump you find only in ballet. (Scholars differ on which came first, but clearly both developments spring from the same footwork fetish.) In 1832, Marie Taglioni, playing an idealized and supernaturally evasive woman in "La Sylphide," danced for brief stretches on the tips of her toes, wearing satin slippers reinforced only with heavy darning. In 1895, the prima ballerina assoluta Pierina Legnani, performing in "Swan Lake" at the Maryinsky Theatre, in St. Petersburg, turned thirty-two fouettés, those flashy whip-kick twirls, on pointe shoes that her Italian shoemakers had furnished with a sturdier, more supportive box for the toes. Local dancers, desperate to add the showstopper move to their arsenal, urged Russian shoemakers to harden the toes of their dance slippers by any means necessary—*et voilà,* the toe shoe, as it was until Eliza Minden.



Minden's mother founded and directed the Connecticut Dance School, a regional ballet training center in Fairfield, Connecticut. Her father owns the Edwin Gaynor Company, which manufactures wiring devices for lamps and switches for fluorescent lights. Dinner conversations at home moved easily from discussions of, say, injection-molding machines to talk of the adagio in Act II of "Giselle."

Minden, who danced from an early age, gave up any thoughts of a professional career when she was accepted at Yale. But she took ballet classes through college and managed professional companies after she left. And she never forgot how much pointe shoes hurt—for her, they took the joy out of dancing. Ever since she was twelve, she says, she had felt that the design could be improved. Finally, one day not long after she had graduated from college, she took a pair of pointe shoes and sliced them in half with her brother's band saw to see how they were made.

In 1986, a year after her investigations with the band saw, Minden discovered T. O. Dey, a New York City shoemaker that specializes in unusual requests—matching slippers for brides and bridesmaids, custom boxing shoes for Mike Tyson, winter booties for Park Avenue poodles. Within months, she had her first viable prototype: the toe box and shank were one piece, and covered with a shock-absorbing foam. She then asked dancers to test it, over and over. She had particular difficulty shaping the platform so that dancers could perform the supple, rolling transitions from demipointe to pointe required by Balanchine choreography: when the platform was too rounded, the dancers kept falling off pointe, but when it was too square, they



"For some reason, the earthlings are not regarding us with the level of awe we were told to expect."

would lose control of the process and pop up suddenly, like a jack-in-the-box. Based on their reports, she tinkered with the shape and the ingredients for the next six years until she finally came up with a production model that was refined enough to do what a broken-in Capezio or a Freed does. The result of all this research and development—a toe-box-and-shank combination that looks like a soup ladle you might see on "Iron Chef"—is made of a mystery substance that she calls specially treated thermoplastic elastomeric. "It's a proprietary element," Minden explains cloudily. "It might exist in scuba fins. It might exist in telephone cords."

In 1989, she began mass-producing the shoes at the Cardinal Shoe factory, in Lawrence, Massachusetts. She built up a clientele by travelling to any city that had a ballet company and school—Chicago, Houston, Nashville, Knoxville, Memphis, Asheville, Atlanta, Albuquerque, Cleveland. "That was part of what got me into karate," Minden says. "I was a little nervous travelling around the country with my ballerina assistant, lugging these great big sample cases, going to cities where the downtowns clear out after dark."

She quickly discovered that, despite a few "late-career conversions," professional dancers had long since made up their minds. But younger dancers were still looking for the right shoe. She concentrated on them, giving free lectures on the history of pointe shoes, explaining how pointe-shoe technology and pointe technique developed together. Then she gave fittings of her up-to-the-minute shoes to any student who wanted to try them.

It was a savvy move, since a girl's first habits grow into the fixed routine of the professional. "There's actually a sort of fetish involved," Dr. William Hamilton, the orthopedist for City Ballet, A.B.T., and the School of American Ballet, says. "They all have their own way—everything from sewing on the ribbons and elastics to how they prepare the shoe and break the shank, and they're not going to change that kind of thing, because it's almost superstition." Michael Weiskopf, the publisher of the magazines *Pointe* and *Dance Retailer News*, among other titles, says, "Ballerinas are volume users. It's a relatively small group of people buying lots of shoes. So branding is of vital interest, because, generally, if you get a customer you get her for a long time."

On a recent Saturday afternoon, I went to a fitting at Gaynor Minden's headquarters, in Chelsea, in a classic high-ceilinged room with a barre-and-mirror setup and fabric hanging across the stockroom hallway like a stage curtain. Diana Barral, a thirteen-year-old (she wore her grade-school class ring on her wedding finger), had come in from Norwood, New Jersey, because, as her mother, Lynn, explained, she had been on pointe for about a year and seemed to be struggling with it, especially in her left foot. Her teacher had recommended Gaynor Mindens, with their easy-to-find, factory-consistent balance point, because, Lynn said, "it's important just starting out to have success."

The fitter, Karen Lacy, asked the girl if she'd had any complaints or injuries, and Diana said, "Yeah, fish foot." Lacy, who is also a dancer, knew what she meant: the ankle sometimes went all floppy when she needed it to be strong. Diana took off her shoes and began following Lacy's quiet, dance-class-style commands, first barefoot ("Point your foot. Now put it flat on the floor"), then in the toe shoes ("Grand plié. Now set yourself on pointe"). With the toe shoes on, Diana, who was skinny and, when she stood on pointe, nearly six feet tall, wobbled a little, like a stilt walker or a young giraffe, but she seemed accustomed to it.

As they closed in on the proper fit—Diana needed a shorter vamp, a softer shank, a medium-width box, a snugger heel—Lacy narrated the process in dancer shorthand, explaining the new technology along the way. Lynn sat on the edge of a pink couch, asking studious and concerned questions. Diana kept peeking at her shoes in the mirror and mentioning her friend Allegra, who also wore Gaynor Mindens. Toward the end of the fitting, Lacy asked if Diana could tell the difference.

"Oh, yeah, it's nice."

"How do they feel?" Lacy asked.

"Pretty comfortable. But if you're up there for a long time they start to hurt."

"Yeah, well," her mother said quietly, and Lacy put her head down and went back to putting away shoes. There was a moment of stoic silence, and the subject didn't come up again. A few minutes later, Diana was looking at a "dancer emer-

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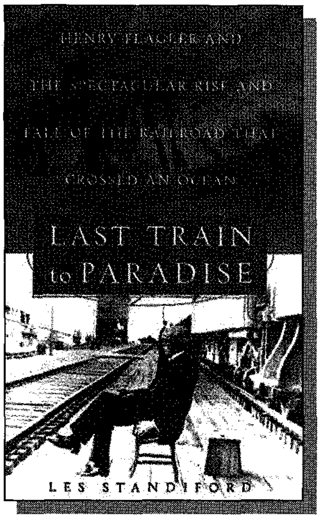

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Radiant, in the Paris sun, the clustered chairs
and canopies, the clustered leaves, one and one
and one—and down the boulevard, the circus tent
in a blowsy park, the Hospital, boulangeries,
the Institute where Curie turns, then takes
in her blackened, slender fingers a finger-shaped

tube of radiation. And the blue Atlantic, radiant,
the American shore, the gold-flecked palette
Paul Cadmus lifts. It is a midday and sundown
in March. He will paint on the flank of an acrobat
a gilded skin. She will stroke down the test tube
a ticking wand. There is sunlight on their sleeves,

as the equinox shifts and the pale-bricked house
of Physics throws open its smallest doors. Radiant,
the boulevards and shorelines, the peat fields, polders,
steeple tops, the Appalachians, Pyrenees,
the river-etched terraces of Warsaw.
And the circus tent with its acrobats, stern-faced

and gilded, circling the ring on their parallel horses.
Radiant, their sudden shape, like fission's sudden
pyramid: one on the shoulders of two, two
on the shoulders of four, four on the eight
pumping, glistening haunches, and the sixteen
polished hooves, mute in the swirling dust.

—*Linda Bierds*

gency kit" (joint wrap, sewing kit, liquid bandage, antibiotic ointment, ponytail holders, etc.), which she called "so cool."

Gaynor Mindens have gained a following among beginners like Diana Barral, and the company has enjoyed "double-digit growth" for ten consecutive years. (Capezio will soon be coming out with its own version of a toe shoe with a molded synthetic box.) "For the slightly less proficient dancer, the amateur, the student, it's a great thing to have facilitated balance," Katy Keller, a physical therapist for City Ballet, says. "But professionals don't necessarily want that. They'll tell you they're so balanced on pointe in the Gaynor Mindens that they can't play around with the gradations, the subtleties of expression."

For purists (and most ballerinas are), this sort of recommendation could easily consign the shoe to the hall of high-tech perfidies, along with the giant Prince racquet in tennis and Callaway's Big Bertha driver in golf—if it weren't for Gillian Murphy. Murphy switched to the shoe in 1994, at the age of fifteen, after an international competition (she was one of the finalists). She joined A.B.T. two years later, in 1996, and moved speedily from soloist to principal, largely on the solidity of her pointe technique. She can routinely turn a quadruple pirouette, the ballet equivalent of landing a quad in figure skating. Critics, a highly foot-conscious crew, regularly point out hers. "I have never seen such feet before," Joan Acocella wrote in these pages. "Strong as a truncheon, sensitive as a finger."

Murphy likes the consistent balance of her shoe. "There's something to be said for being right up in the middle," she says. "A dancer shouldn't be intimidated by being up there." However, Merrill Ashley, who for thirty-one years at City Ballet commanded the sort of pointe-wizard reputation that Murphy is now growing into, finds the shoes "appalling, quite frankly." So

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appalling that she won't refer to Murphy by name, saying only that she saw them on "the principal dancer" in "one of the major companies." When I said the name, Ashley nodded. Or, more accurately, she drew in her breath until the word, like the shadow of Beelzebub, had dispersed.

"I just can't imagine being a professional dancer and wearing those," she said. "Aesthetically, from the audience they look bad. They're going off in their own directions. Or the foot points and they don't. It looks like she's got a skate on. It's not a foot anymore. It's a shoe!"

But, apart from her extreme distaste for the look of the shoe, Ashley could almost be a hostile witness for the defense. "On the other hand, I imagine it would be fantastic to have a shoe that lasts," she said. "I used to change all the time, especially when I wore Freeds. I'd wear two pairs for one ballet. I'd be in the wings changing shoes. And to not have to worry about that, and not have to sew shoes every five seconds, and to just feel confident that the shoe will feel the same way through the entire performance—that would be a great pleasure."

Ashley's career might have been different if Gaynor Mindens had been around in her day. She attributes a "career-changing" injury she suffered—in 1974, she tore the ligaments around a bunion on her left foot, the one dancers stand on to do most of their turns and extensions—to a period when she switched from Capezios to Freeds, which broke down so fast that they often failed to give her any support onstage. She had made the switch because Balanchine found Freeds softer, more expressive, and, above all, quiet. Sometime in the sixties, by his fiat, nearly all City Ballet dancers began to wear them.

The larger issues of this debate—which sets the strictures of ballet's aesthetics against its athletic demands—are familiar ones. But precedent favors the new shoe; the ballet world has a way of insulting athletic developments and then incorporating them into its aesthetic vocabulary. During City Ballet's first trip abroad, in 1950, for example, the British press called the Balanchine style, with its fast footwork and its emphasis on pointe, coldly athletic. And, before Marie Taglioni appeared in "La Sylphide," the act of rising on pointe was considered circus acrobatics.

But some dancers do have uncomplicated reactions to the shoe, particularly in England, where the cult of Balanchine doesn't loom as large. Sian Murphy (no relation to Gillian), a Londoner in the corps of the Royal Ballet, started wearing Gaynor Mindens when she had her first serious injury—a series of stress fractures in the long bones of her foot. "The first time anyone tries them on, they go, 'Omigod, they're just like trainers!' " Murphy said. "And I could never go back to my old shoes, because these seem so luxurious by comparison." According to Murphy, on her side of the ocean there's less controversy about the new technology. "Lots of girls are trying them, and the people who don't wear them just say they don't suit their feet. It's not a case of losing your morals in the ballet world."

Harder to disentangle is the value of pain—or stoicism—in ballet. Most professional ballet dancers feel completely comfortable on pointe (a surprising number of them compared being up on pointe to breathing), but, like all athletes, dancers frequently have to weigh the risks of "playing hurt" against the rewards of performing well. In this gamble, pain is just one consideration among many. Jennifer Tinsley, a soloist with New York City Ballet, spoke of a time in the 1999 season when she took the risk and won. "This one time, it was absolutely worth it to me to dance through injury until my tendon actually tore," she said. "I knew it was tearing, but I didn't want to stop, because one of the soloists was out—I was in the corps then—and I was being used in all her roles. I was in horrible pain. It hurt to walk. But I came in each day and each day something new was given to me, and I thought, I cannot stop. There's no way on earth I can stop. And I got promoted! And about two weeks later my tendon tore—onstage. And I was out for nine months. But I got promoted!"

No shoe can eliminate stories like that from the ballet repertory. But the Gaynor Minden may give a dancer a few more weeks of healthy performances to gamble with. "We are the first and, as far as I know, the only pointe shoe that was ever designed with dancers' health and safety in mind," Minden says. "I educated myself and learned what I could, and tried to make a pointe shoe that would address this stuff. But don't worry. You'll still suffer." ♦

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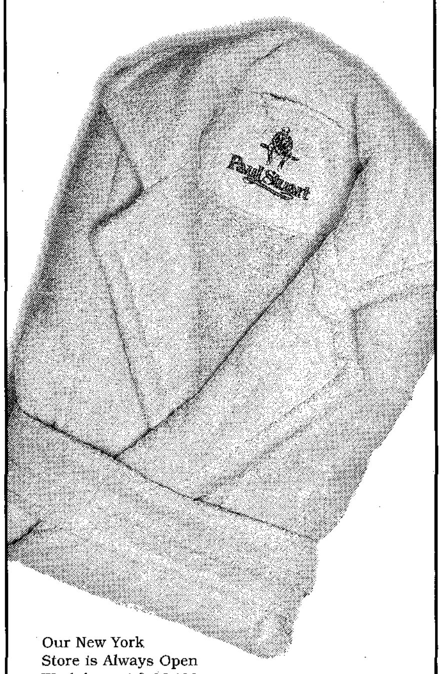

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

RESEARCHERS SAY

BY IAN FRAZIER

According to a study just released by scientists at Duke University, life is too hard. Although their findings mainly concern life as experienced by human beings, the study also applies to other animate forms, the scientists claim. Years of tests, experiments, and complex computer simulations now provide solid statistical evidence in support of old folk sayings that described life as "a vale of sorrows," "a woeful trial," "a kick in the teeth," "not worth living," and so on. Like much common wisdom, these sayings turn out to contain more than a little truth.

Authors of the twelve-hundred-page study were hesitant to single out any particular factors responsible for making life tough. A surprise, they say, is that they found so many. Before the study was undertaken, researchers had assumed, by positive logic, that life could not be *that* bad. As the data accumulated, however, they provided incontrovertible proof that life is actually worse than most living things can stand. Human endurance equals just a tiny fraction of what it should be, given everything it must put up with. In a personal note in the afterword, researchers stated that, statistically speaking, life is "just too much," and as yet they have no plausible theory how anyone gets through it at all.

A major disadvantage to living which the study called attention to is, of course, death. In fact, so obvious are its drawbacks that no one before had thought to examine or measure them empirically. Death's effects on life, the scientists pointed out, are two: First, death intrudes constantly and unpleasantly by putting life at risk at every stage, from infancy through advanced adulthood, degrading its quality and compromising happiness. For individuals of every species, death represents a chronic, worrisome threat that they can never completely ignore.

Secondly, and far worse, death also constitutes an overwhelmingly no-win experience in itself. Many of life's well-known stress producers—divorce, loss of employment, moving, even fighting traffic—still hold out hope of a better outcome in the future. After all, one may end up with a better spouse, exciting new job, beautiful home, or fresh bottle from the drive-through liquor store. Death, by contrast, involves as much trouble as any conventional stress, if not more. Yet, at the end of the medical humiliations, physical suffering, money concerns, fear, and tedium of dying, one has no outcome to look forward to except being dead. This alone, the study found, is enough to give the entire life process a negative tinge.

Besides dying, life is burdened with countless occurrences that are almost equally unacceptable to active and vital individuals. In many cases which the scientists observed, humans no longer functioned properly after the age of seventy or seventy-five. A large majority of subjects in that age range exhibited significant loss of foot speed, upper-body strength, reflexes, hair, and altitude of vertical leap. Accompanying these impairments were other health glitches, sometimes in baffling number and variety. Such acquired traits carried the additional downside of making their possessors either "undesirable" or "very undesirable" to members of the opposite sex in the key eighteen-to-thirty-five demographic. Researchers were able to offer no credible hope for the development of treatments to deal with these creeping inadequacies.

Somewhat simplifying the study's collection of data was the natural law first discovered by Newton that things are rough all over. Thus, what happens to you will always be just as bad (relatively speaking) as what happens to anybody else. Or, to frame it another way, no problem is effectively "minor" if you yourself have it. One example is the mat-

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tress cover, or quilted pad, that goes over the mattress before you put on the fitted sheet, and that pops loose from one corner of the mattress in the middle of the night nearly sixty per cent of the time, experts say. After it does, it will often work its way diagonally down the bed, taking the fitted sheet with it, until it becomes a bunched-together ridge of cloth poking up at about kidney level. The problem it represents to the individual experiencing it at that moment is absolute, in the sense that it cannot usefully be compared with difficulties in the lives of people in China or anywhere. The poke in the kidneys and the press of bare mattress against the face are simply the accumulating misery of life making itself known.

Nine out of ten of the respondents, identified by just their first initials for the purpose of the survey, stated that they would give up completely if they knew how. The remainder also didn't see the point of going on any longer but still clung to a slight hope for something in the mail. Quitting the struggle and lying face down on the floor was a coping strategy favored by most or all. Situations like having to wait an entire day for a deliveryman to deliver a breakfront and the guy didn't say exactly when he would be there and in the end didn't come and didn't even bother to call were so pointless and awful that the hell with the whole deal, many respondents said.

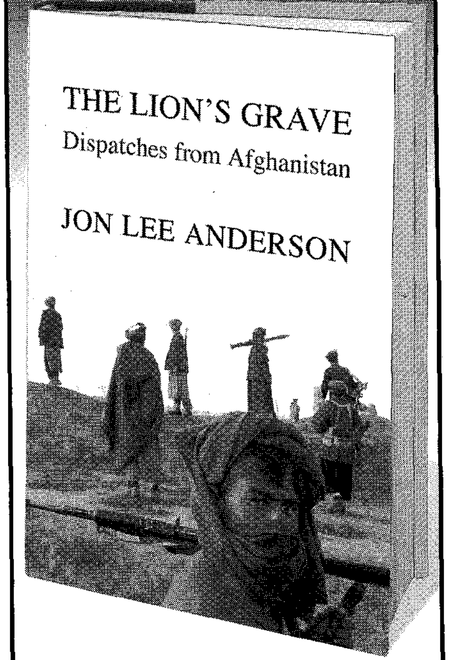
Interestingly, the numbers bear them out. The point, or points, of going on with existence, when charted and quantified, paint a very grim picture indeed. Merely trying to get a shoe off a child has been shown to release a certain chemical into the system which causes a reaction exactly opposite to what the task requires. Despite vigorous effort and shouting, the thing won't come off, for Christ's sake, as can be seen in the formula written out in full in Figure 7. Furthermore, that level of suffering doesn't include the additional fact that a person's spouse may not consider what the person does every day to be "work," because he or she happens occasionally to enjoy it; so what is he or she supposed to do, get a job he or she hates, instead? From a mathematical standpoint, this particular problem is an infinite regression.

Flammia Brothers Pharmaceuticals, which paid somebody to say it paid for the study, frankly admits that it does not as yet have the answers. In the interim, it offers a wide array of experience-blocking drugs, which consist of copyrighted names without pills to go with them, and which certainly might work, depending on one's susceptibility, financial history, and similar factors. Hundreds of thousands of notepads with the Flammia Brothers' logo and colorful drug names at the top of every page are already in circulation in doctors' offices and examining rooms, and a soothing poultice may be made of these pages soaked in water and driveway salt from Ace Hardware. (Most health-insurance plans may or may not cover the cost of the salt, excluding delivery.)

Other large drug manufacturers, while not willing to go quite as far, still substantially follow the Flammia Brothers' program. The fact that life is beyond us has been firmly established by now. All the information is in, and no real dispute remains. But with the temporary absence of lasting remedies, and looking to a future when they won't be necessary, the manufacturers' consortium suggests that consumers send them money in cash or check, no questions asked. Major health organizations have unanimously endorsed this goal. Originally, the consortium explained that the companies might need the money to develop a new generation of drugs narrowly focussed on curing many previously uncured problems. More recently, however, they have backed off of that.

Why we were brought into the world in the first place only to suffer and die is an area of research in which much remains to be done. Like other problems thought impossible in the past, this one, too, will someday be solved. Then anybody afflicted with questions like "Why me?," "What did I do to deserve this?," "How did I get in this lousy mess?," and so on could be given a prescription, maybe even through diagnostic services provided online. The possibilities are exciting. At the same time, we must not underestimate our adversary, life itself. Uncomfortable even at good moments, difficult and unfair usually, and a complete nightmare much too often, life will stubbornly resist betterment, always finding new ways of being more than we can stand. ♦

"First drafts of history don't come any better."*



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BY SUSAN SONTAG

MAGNUM

In June, 1938, Virginia Woolf published *Three Guineas*, her brave, unwelcomed reflections on the roots of war. Written during the preceding two years, while she and most of her intimates and fellow-writers were rapt by the advancing Fascist insurrection in Spain, the book was couched as a tardy reply to a letter from an eminent lawyer in London who had asked, "How in your opinion are we to prevent war?" Woolf begins by observing tartly that a truthful dialogue between them may not be possible. For though they belong to the same class, "the educated class," a vast gulf separates them: the lawyer is a man and she is a woman. Men make war. Men (most men) like war, or at least they find "some glory, some necessity, some satisfaction in fighting" that women (most women) do not seek or find. What does an educated—that is, privileged, well-off—woman like her know of war? Can her reactions to its horrors be like his?

Woolf proposes they test this "difficulty of communication" by looking at some images of war that the beleaguered Spanish government has been sending out twice a week to sympathizers abroad. Let's see "whether when we look at the same photographs we feel the same things," she writes. "This morning's collection contains the photograph of what might be a man's body, or a woman's; it is so mutilated that it might, on the other hand, be the body of a pig. But those certainly are dead children, and that undoubtedly is the section of a house. A bomb has torn open the side; there is still a bird-cage hanging in what was presumably the sitting room." One can't always make out the subject, so thorough is the ruin of flesh and stone that the photographs depict. "However different the education, the traditions behind us," Woolf says to the lawyer, "we"—and here women are the "we"—and he might well have the same response: "War, you say, is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped at whatever cost. And we echo your words. War is an abomination; a barbarity; war must be stopped."

Who believes today that war can be abolished? No one, not even pacifists. We hope only (so far in vain) to stop genocide and bring to justice those who commit gross violations of the laws of war (for there are laws of war, to which combatants should be held), and to stop specific wars by imposing negotiated alternatives to armed conflict. But protesting against war may not have seemed so futile or naïve in the nineteen-thirties. In 1924, on the tenth anniversary of the national mobilization in Germany for the First World War, the conscientious objector Ernst Friedrich published *War*

Against War! (*Krieg dem Kriege!*), an album of more than a hundred and eighty photographs that were drawn mainly from German military and medical archives, and almost all of which were deemed unpublishable by government censors while the war was on. The book starts with pictures of toy soldiers, toy cannons, and other delights of male children everywhere, and concludes with pictures taken in military cemeteries. This is photography as shock therapy. Between the toys and the graves, the reader has an excruciating photo tour of four years of ruin, slaughter, and degradation: wrecked and plundered churches and castles, obliterated villages, ravaged forests, torpedoed passenger steamers, shattered vehicles, hanged conscientious objectors, naked personnel of military brothels, soldiers in death agonies after a poison-gas attack, skeletal Armenian children.

Friedrich did not assume that heart-rending, stomach-turning pictures would speak for themselves. Each photograph has an impassioned caption in four languages (German, French, Dutch, and English), and the wickedness of militarist ideology is excoriated and mocked on every page. Immediately denounced by the German government and by veterans' and other patriotic organizations—in some cities the police raided bookstores, and lawsuits were brought against public display of the photographs—Friedrich's declaration of war against war was acclaimed by left-wing writers, artists, and intellectuals, as well as by the constituencies of the numerous antiwar leagues, who predicted that the book would have a decisive influence on public opinion. By 1930, *War Against War!* had gone through ten editions in Germany and been translated into many languages.

In 1928, in the Kellogg-Briand Pact, fifteen nations, including the United States, France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, and Japan, solemnly renounced war as an instrument of national policy. Freud and Einstein were drawn into the debate four years later, in an exchange of letters published under the title "Why War?" *Three Guineas*, which appeared toward the close of nearly two decades of plangent denunciations of war and war's horrors, was at least original in its focus on what was regarded as too obvious to be mentioned, much less brooded over: that war is a man's game—that the killing machine has a gender, and it is male. Nevertheless, the temerity of Woolf's version of "Why War?" does not make her revulsion against war any less conventional in its rhetoric, and in its summations, rich in repeated phrases. Photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus.

Woolf professes to believe that the shock of such pictures cannot fail to unite people of good will. Although she and the lawyer are separated by the age-old affinities of feeling and practice of their respective sexes, he is hardly a standard-issue bellicose male. After all, his question was not, What are your thoughts about preventing war? It was, How in your opinion are we to prevent war? Woolf challenges this "we" at the start of her book, but after some pages devoted to the feminist point she abandons it.

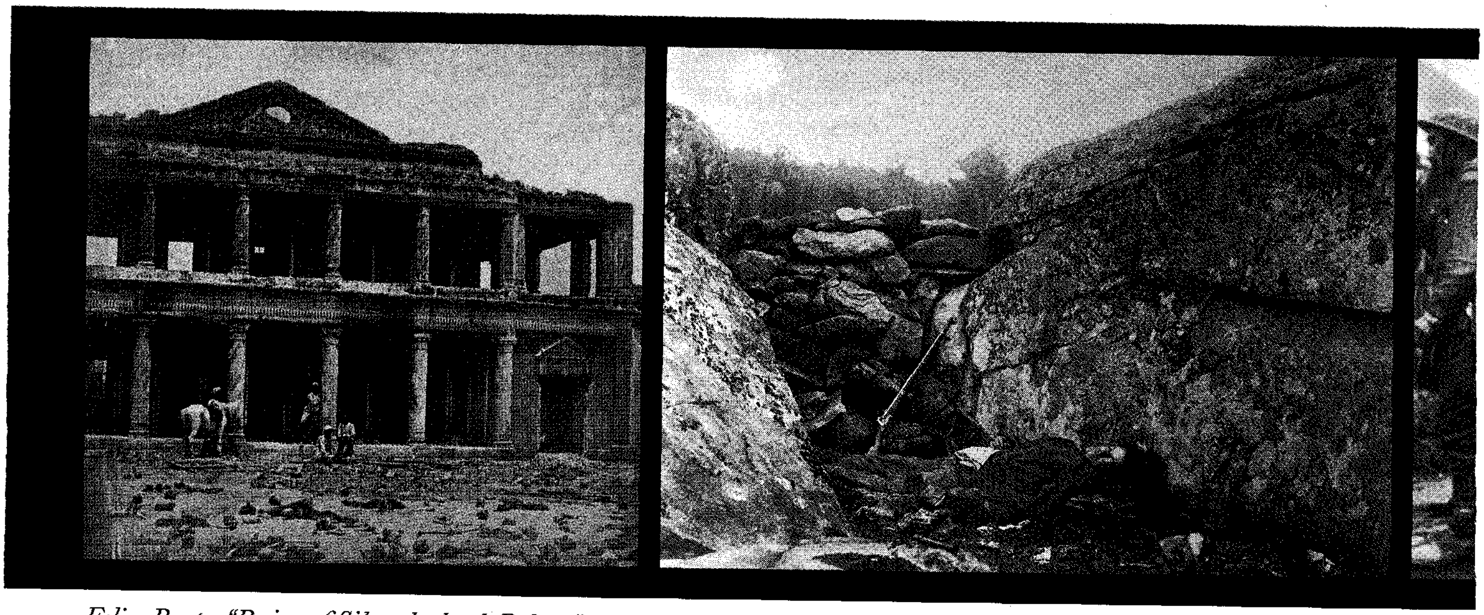
"Here then on the table before us are photographs," she writes of the thought experiment she is proposing to the reader as well as to the spectral lawyer, who is eminent enough to have K.C., King's Counsel, after his name—and may or may not be a real person. Imagine a spread of loose photographs extracted from an envelope that arrived in the morning mail. They show the mangled bodies of adults and children. They show how war evacuates, shatters, breaks apart, levels the built world. A bomb has torn open the side of a house. To be sure, a cityscape is not made of flesh. Still, sheared-off buildings are almost as eloquent as body parts (Kabul; Sarajevo; East Mostar; Grozny; sixteen acres of Lower Manhattan after September 11, 2001; the refugee camp in Jenin). Look, the photographs say, *this* is what it's like. This is what war *does*. And *that*, that is what it does, too. War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins*. Woolf believes that not to be pained by these pictures, not to recoil from them, not to strive to abolish what causes this havoc, this carnage, is a failure of imagination, of empathy.

But surely the photographs could just as well foster greater militancy on behalf of the Republic. Isn't this what they were meant to do? The agreement between Woolf and the lawyer seems entirely presumptive, with the grisly photographs confirming an opinion already held in common. Had his question been, How can we best contribute to the defense of the Spanish Republic against the forces of militarist and clerical fascism?, the photographs might have reinforced a belief in the justness of that struggle.

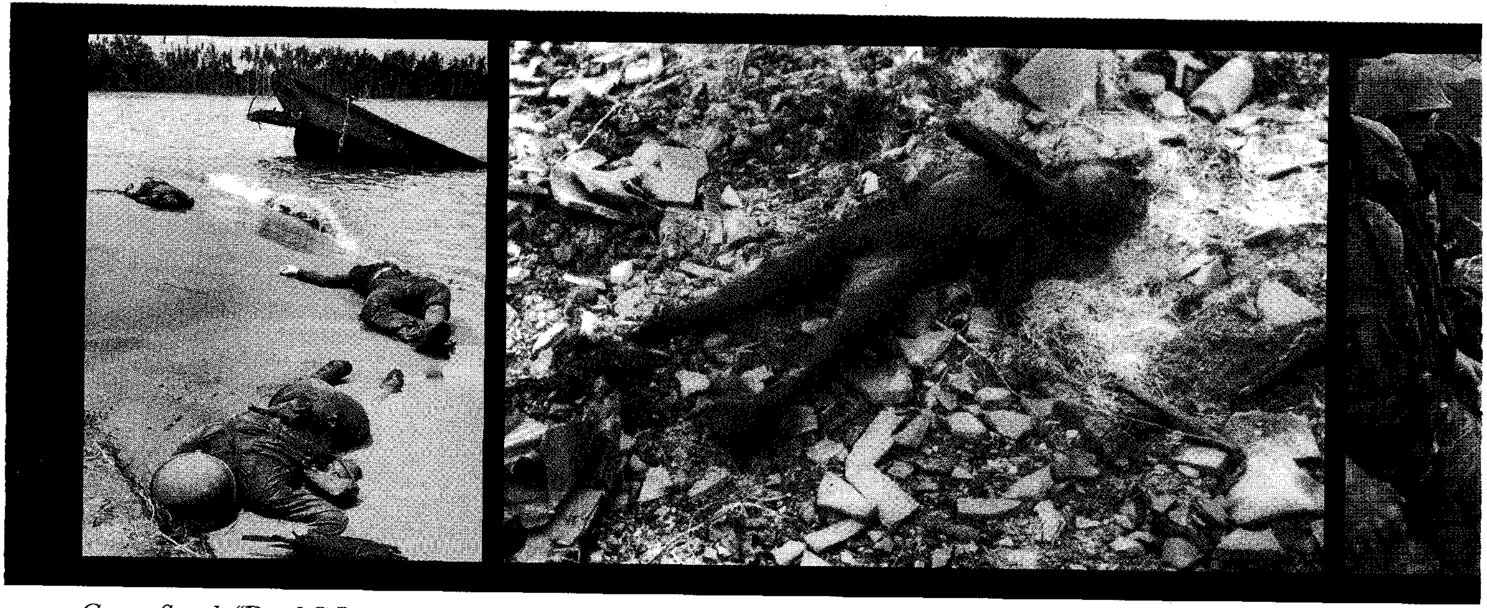
The pictures Woolf has conjured up do not in fact show what war—war in general—does. They show a particular way of waging war, a way at that time routinely described as "barbaric," in which civilians are the target. General Franco was using the tactics of bombardment, massacre, torture, and the killing and mutilation of prisoners that he had perfected as a commanding officer in Morocco in the nineteen-twenties. Then, more acceptably to ruling powers, his victims had been Spain's colonial subjects, darker-hued and infidels to boot; now his victims were compatriots. To read in the pictures, as Woolf does, only what confirms a general abhorrence of war is to stand back from an engagement with Spain as a country with a history. It is to dismiss politics.

For Woolf, as for many antiwar polemicists, war is generic, and the images she describes are of anonymous, generic victims. The pictures sent out by the government in Madrid seem, improbably, not to have been labelled. (Or perhaps Woolf is simply assuming that a photograph should speak for itself.) But to those who are sure that right is on one side, oppression and injustice on the other, and that the fighting must go on, what matters is precisely who is killed and by whom. To an Israeli Jew, a photograph of a child torn apart in the attack on the Sbarro pizzeria in downtown Jerusalem is first of all a photograph of a Jewish child killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber. To a Palestinian, a photograph of a child torn apart by a tank round in Gaza is first of all a photo-

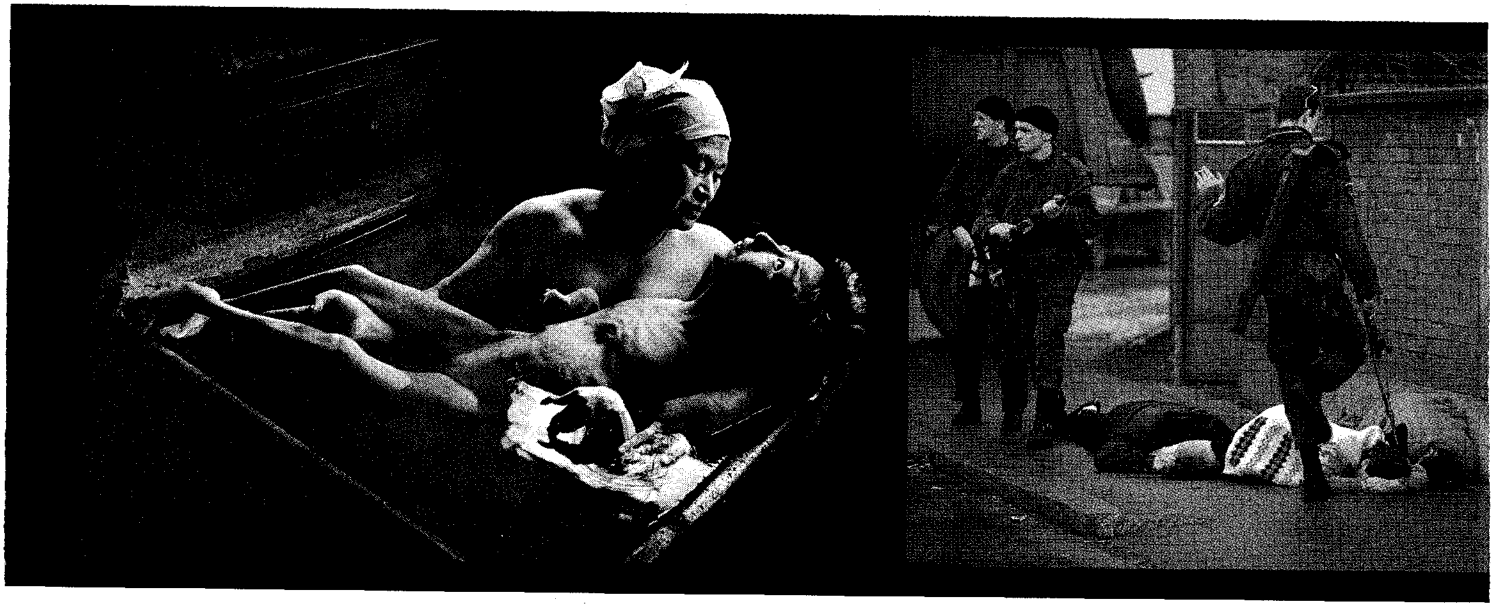
Robert Capa's famous "The Falling Soldier" was taken in 1936, a few weeks after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.



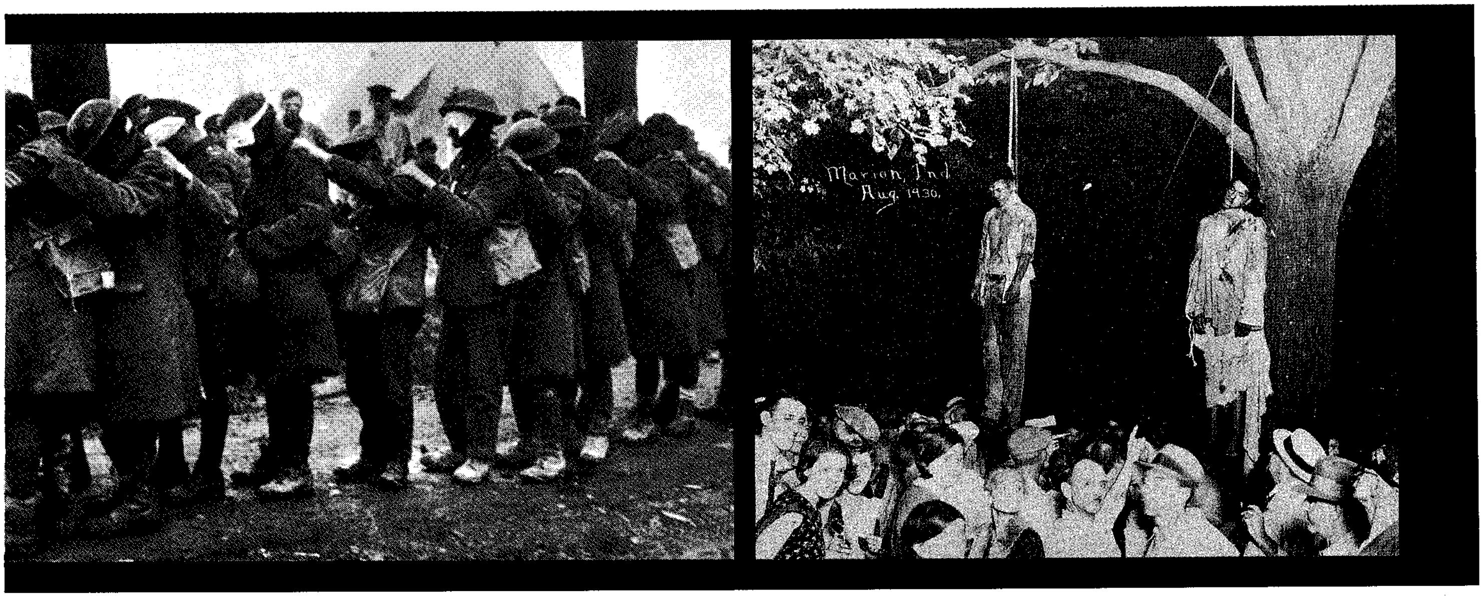
Felice Beato, "Ruins of Sikandarbagh Palace," 1858; Alexander Gardner, "The Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg," 1863



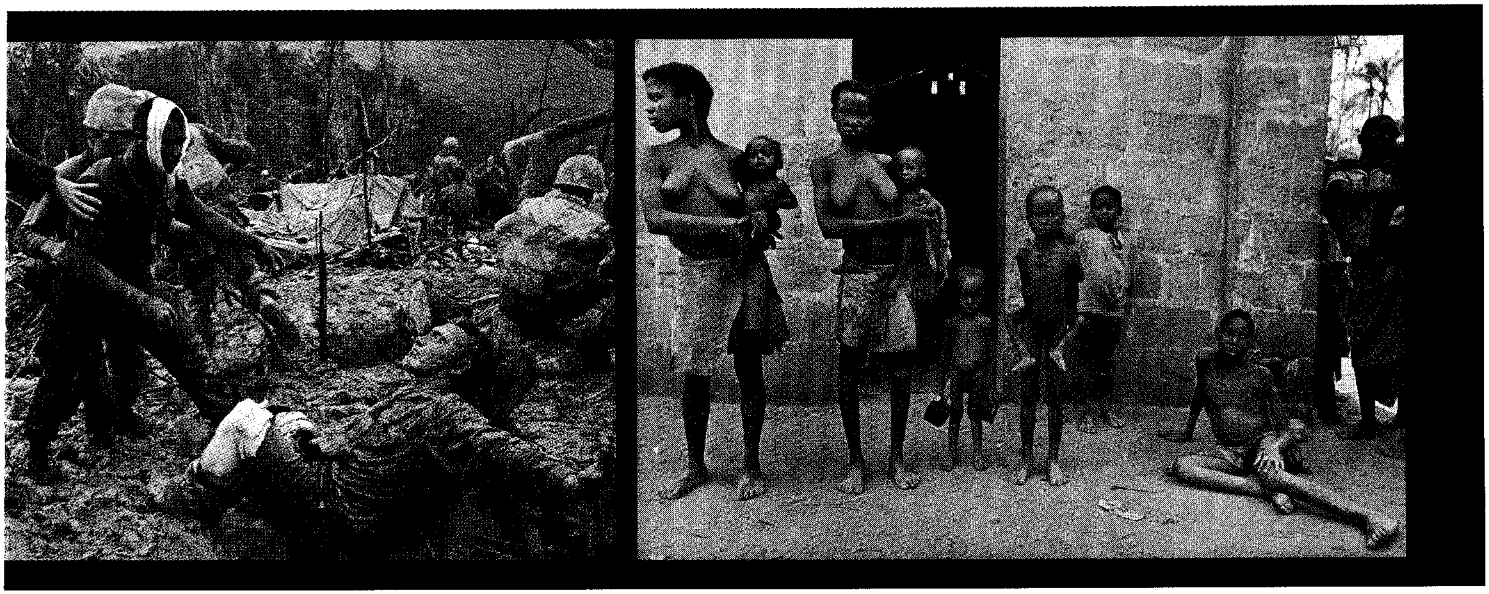
George Strock, "Dead G.I.s on Buna Beach," 1943; Yosuke Yamahata, victim of atomic-bomb attack, Nagasaki, August 10, 1945; Larry



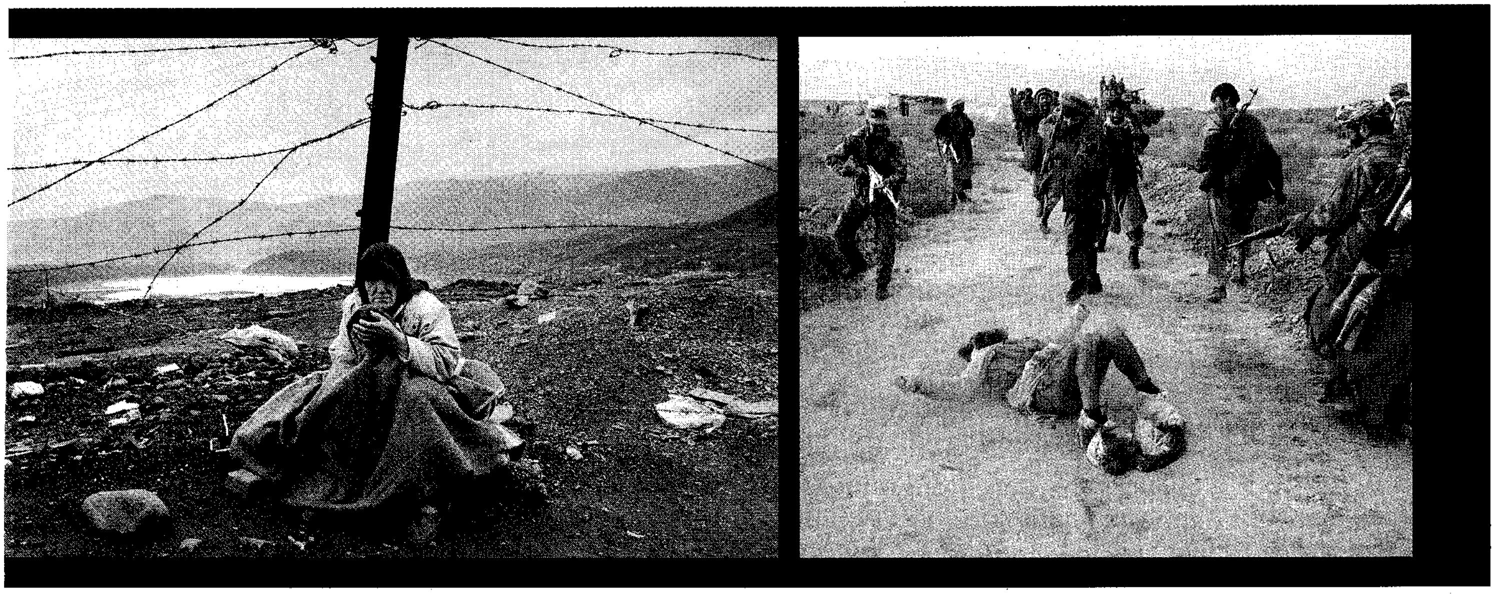
W. Eugene Smith, "Tomoko Uemura Is Bathed by Her Mother," Minamata, 1971; Ron Haviv, Serb militia, Bijeljina, Bosnia, 1992;


Marion, Ind.
Aug. 1930.

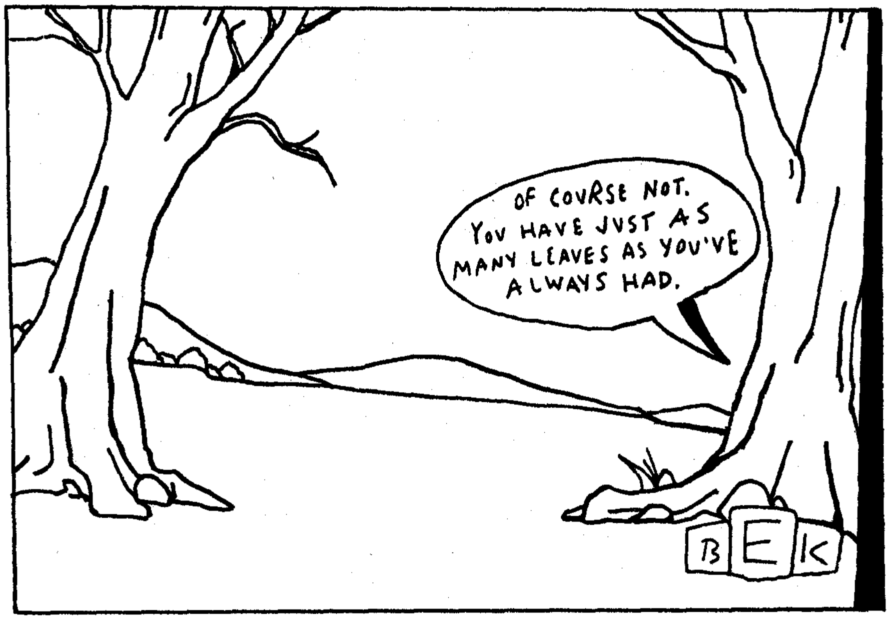
Anonymous, British soldiers blinded by German gas attack, 1918; Anonymous, lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith, 1930.



Burrows, "Reaching Out," Mutter Ridge, Nui Cay Tri, Vietnam, 1966; Don McCullin, food-distribution center in Biafra, 1968.



Sebastião Salgado, Kosovar refugee, Kukes, Albania, 1999; Tyler Hicks, Taliban fighter killed by Northern Alliance, Afghanistan, 2001.


OF COURSE NOT. YOU HAVE JUST AS MANY LEAVES AS YOU'VE ALWAYS HAD.
BEK

graph of a Palestinian child killed by Israeli ordnance. To the militant, identity is everything. And all photographs wait to be explained or falsified by their captions. During the fighting between Serbs and Croats at the beginning of the recent Balkan wars, the same photographs of children killed in the shelling of a village were passed around at both Serb and Croat propaganda briefings. Alter the caption: alter the use of these deaths.

Photographs of mutilated bodies certainly can be used the way Woolf does, to vivify the condemnation of war, and may bring home, for a spell, a portion of its reality to those who have no experience of war at all. But someone who accepts that in the world as currently divided war can become inevitable, and even just, might reply that the photographs supply no evidence, none at all, for renouncing war—except to those for whom the notions of valor and of sacrifice have been emptied of meaning and credibility. The destructiveness of war—short of total destruction, which is not war but suicide—is not in itself an argument against waging war, unless one thinks (as few people actually do) that violence is always unjustifiable, that force is always and in all circumstances wrong: wrong because, as Simone Weil affirms in her sublime essay on war, "The Iliad, or, The Poem of Force," violence turns anybody subjected to it into a thing. But to those who in a given situation see no alternative to armed struggle, violence can exalt someone subjected to it into a martyr or a hero.

In fact, there are many uses of the innumerable opportunities that a modern life supplies for regarding—at a distance, through the medium of photography—other people's pain. Photographs of an atrocity may give rise to opposing responses: a call for peace; a cry for revenge; or simply the bemused awareness, continually restocked by photographic information, that terrible things happen. Who can forget the three color pictures by Tyler Hicks that the *New York Times* ran on November 13, 2001, across the upper half of the first page of its daily section devoted to America's new war? The triptych depicted the fate of a wounded Taliban soldier who had been found in a ditch by some Northern Alliance soldiers advancing toward Kabul. First panel: the soldier is being dragged on his back by two of his captors—one has grabbed an arm, the other a leg—along a rocky road. Second panel: he is surrounded, gazing up in terror as he is pulled to his feet. Third panel: he is supine with arms outstretched and knees bent, naked from the waist down, a bloodied heap left on the road by the dispersing military mob that has just finished butchering him. A good deal of stoicism is needed to get through the newspaper each morning, given the likelihood of seeing pictures that could make you cry. And the disgust and pity that pictures like Hicks's inspire should not distract from asking what pictures, whose cruelties, whose deaths you are *not* being shown.

II

Awareness of the suffering that accumulates in wars happening elsewhere is something constructed. Principally in the form that is registered by cameras, it flares up, is shared by many people, and fades from view. In contrast to a written account, which, depending on its complexity of thought, references, and vocabulary, is pitched at a larger or smaller readership, a photograph has only one language and is destined potentially for all.

In the first important wars of which there are accounts by photographers, the Crimean War and the American Civil War, and in every other war until the First World War, combat itself was beyond the camera's ken. As for the war photographs published between 1914 and 1918, nearly all anonymous, they were—insofar as they did convey something of the terrors and devastation endured—generally in the epic mode, and were usually depictions of an aftermath: corpse-strewn or lunar landscapes left by trench warfare; gutted French villages the war had passed through. The photographic monitoring of war as we know it had to wait for a radical upgrade of professional equipment: lightweight cameras, such as the Leica, using 35-mm. film that could be exposed thirty-six times before the camera needed to be reloaded. The Spanish Civil War was the first war to be witnessed ("covered") in the modern sense: by a corps of professional photographers at the lines of military engagement and in the towns under bombardment, whose work was immediately seen in newspapers and magazines in Spain and abroad. Pictures could be taken in the thick of battle, military censorship permitting, and civilian victims and exhausted, begrimed soldiers studied up close. The war America waged in Vietnam, the first to be witnessed day after day by television cameras, introduced the home front to a new intimacy with death and destruction. Ever since, battles and mas-

PAGES 84-85: TIME LIFE SYNDICATION (5,7,9); CONTACT (8,11); HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES (1); CORBIS (2); THE GRANGER COLLECTION (3); COURTESY ALLEN-LITTLEFIELD COLLECTION/PIXELPRESS (4); YOSUKE YAMAHATA (6); VII (10); GETTY IMAGES (12)

sacres filmed as they unfold have been a routine ingredient of the ceaseless flow of domestic, small-screen entertainment. Creating a perch for a particular conflict in the consciousness of viewers exposed to dramas from everywhere requires the daily diffusion and rediffusion of snippets of footage about the conflict. The understanding of war among people who have not experienced war is now chiefly a product of the impact of these images.

Non-stop imagery (television, streaming video, movies) surrounds us, but, when it comes to remembering, the photograph has the deeper bite. Memory freeze-frames; its basic unit is the single image. In an era of information overload, the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form for memorizing it. The photograph is like a quotation, or a maxim or proverb. Each of us mentally stocks hundreds of photographs, subject to instant recall. Cite the most famous photograph taken during the Spanish Civil War, the Republican soldier "shot" by Robert Capa's camera at the same moment he is hit by an enemy bullet, and virtually everyone who has heard of that war can summon to mind the grainy black-and-white image of a man in a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves collapsing backward on a hillock, his right arm flung behind him as his rifle leaves his grip—about to fall, dead, onto his own shadow.

It is a shocking image, and that is the point. Conscripted as part of journalism, images were expected to arrest attention, startle, surprise. As the old advertising slogan of *Paris Match*, founded in 1949, had it: "The weight of words, the shock of photos." The hunt for more dramatic—as they're often described—images drives the photographic enterprise, and is part of the normality of a culture in which shock has become a leading stimulus of consumption and source of value. "Beauty will be convulsive, or it will not be," André Breton proclaimed. He called this aesthetic ideal "surrealist," but, in a culture radically revamped by the ascendancy of mercantile values, to ask that images be jarring, clamorous, eye-opening seems like elementary realism or good business sense. How else to get attention for one's product or one's art? How else to make a dent when there is incessant exposure to images, and overexposure to a handful of images seen again and again? The image as shock and the image as cliché are two aspects of the same presence. Sixty-five years ago, all photographs were novelties to some degree. (It would have been inconceivable to Virginia Woolf—who did appear on the cover of *Time* in 1937—that one day her face would become a much reproduced image on T-shirts, book bags, refrigerator magnets, coffee mugs, mouse pads.) Atrocity photographs were scarce in the winter of 1936-37: the depiction of war's horrors in the photographs Woolf discusses in *Three Guineas* seemed almost like clandestine knowledge. Our situation is altogether different. The ultra-familiar, ultra-celebrated image—of an agony, of ruin—is an unavoidable feature of our camera-mediated knowledge of war.

Photography has kept company with death ever since cameras were invented, in 1839. Because an image produced with a camera is, literally, a trace of something brought before the lens, photographs had an advantage over any painting as a memento of the vanished past and the dear departed. To seize death in the making was another matter: the camera's reach remained limited as long as it had to be lugged about, set down, steadied. But, once the camera was emancipated from the tripod, truly portable, and equipped with a range finder and a variety of lenses that permitted unprecedented feats of close observation from a distant vantage point, picture-taking acquired an immediacy and authority greater than any verbal account in conveying the horror of mass-produced death. If there was one year when the power of photographs to define, not merely record, the most abominable realities trumped all the complex narratives, surely it was 1945, with the pictures taken in April and early May in Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, and Dachau, in the first days after the camps were liberated, and those taken by Japanese witnesses such as Yosuke Yamahata in the days following the incineration of the populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in early August.

Photographs had the advantage of uniting two contradictory features. Their credentials of objectivity were inbuilt, yet they always had, necessarily, a point of view. They were a record of the real—incontrovertible, as no verbal account, however impartial, could be (assuming that they showed what they purported to show)—since a machine was doing the recording. And they bore witness to the real, since a person had been there to take them.

The photographs Woolf received are treated as windows on the war: transparent views of what they show. It was of no interest to her that each had an "author"—that photographs represent the view of someone—although it was precisely in the late nineteen-thirties that the profession of bearing individual witness to war and war's atrocities with a camera was forged. Before, war photography had mostly appeared in daily and weekly newspapers. (Newspapers had been printing photographs since 1880.) By 1938, in addition to the older popular magazines that used photographs as illustrations—such as *National Geographic* and *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, both founded in the late nineteenth century—there were large-circulation weekly magazines, notably the French *Vu*, the American *Life*, and the British *Picture Post*, devoted entirely to pictures (accompanied by brief texts keyed to the photos) and "picture stories" (four or five pictures by the same photographer attached to a story that further dramatized the images); in a newspaper, it was the photograph—and there was only one—that accompanied the story.

In a system based on the maximal reproduction and diffusion of images, witnessing requires star witnesses, renowned for their bravery and zeal. War photographers inherited what glamour going to war still had among the anti-bellicose, especially when the war was felt to be one of those rare conflicts in which someone of conscience would be impelled to take sides. In contrast to the 1914-18 war, which, it was clear to many of the victors, had been a colossal mistake, the second "world war" was unanimously felt by the winning side to have been a necessary war, a war that had to be fought. Photojournalism came into its own in the early nineteen-forties—wartime. This least controversial of modern wars, whose necessity was sealed by the full revelation of Nazi infamy in Europe, offered photojournalists a new legitimacy. There was little place for the left-wing dissidence that had informed much of the serious use of photographs in the interwar period, including Friedrich's *War Against War!* and the early work of Robert Capa, the most celebrated figure in a generation of politically engaged photographers whose work centered on war and victimhood.

In 1947, Capa and a few friends formed a coöperative, the Magnum Photo Agency. Magnum's charter, moralistic in the way of the founding charters of other international organizations and guilds created in the immediate postwar period, spelled out an enlarged, ethically weighted mission for photojournalists: to chronicle their own time as fair-minded witnesses free of chauvinistic prejudices. In Magnum's voice, photography declared itself a global enterprise. The photographer's beat was "the world." He or she was a rover, with wars of unusual interest (for there were many wars) a favorite destination.

The memory of war, however, like all memory, is mostly local. Armenians, the majority in diaspora, keep alive the memory of the Armenian genocide of 1915; Greeks don't forget the sanguinary civil war in Greece that raged through most of the second half of the nineteen-forties. But for a war to break out of its immediate constituency and become a subject of international attention it must be regarded as something of an exception, as wars go, and represent more than the clashing interests of the belligerents themselves. Apart from the major world conflicts, most wars do not acquire the requisite fuller meaning. An example: the Chaco War (1932-35), a butchery engaged in by Bolivia (population one million) and Paraguay (three and a half million) that took the lives of a hundred thousand soldiers, and which was covered by a German photojournalist, Willi Ruge, whose superb closeup battle pictures are as forgotten as that war. But the Spanish Civil War, in the second half of the nineteen-thirties, the Serb and Croat wars against Bosnia in the mid-nineties, the drastic worsening of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that began in 2000—these relatively small wars were guaranteed the attention of many cameras because they were invested with the meaning of larger struggles: the Spanish Civil War because it was a stand against the Fascist menace, and was understood to be a dress rehearsal for the coming European, or "world," war; the Bosnian war because it was the stand of a small, fledgling European country wishing to remain multicultural as well as independent against the dominant power in the region and its neo-Fascist program of ethnic cleansing; and the conflict in the Middle East because the United States supports the State of Israel. Indeed, it is felt by many who champion the Palestinian side that what is ultimately at stake, by proxy, in the struggle to end the Israeli domination of the territories captured in 1967 is the strength of the forces opposing the juggernaut of American-sponsored globalization, economic and cultural.

The memorable sites of suffering documented by admired photographers in the nineteen-fifties, sixties, and early seventies were mostly in Asia and Africa—Werner Bischof's photographs of famine victims in India, Don McCullin's pictures of war and famine in Biafra, W. Eugene Smith's photographs of the victims of the lethal pollution of a Japanese fishing village. The Indian and African famines were not just "natural" disasters: they were preventable; they were crimes of the greatest magnitude. And what happened in Minamata was obviously a crime; the Chisso Corporation knew that it was dumping mercury-laden waste into the bay. (Smith was severely and permanently injured by Chisso goons who were ordered to put an end to his camera inquiry.) But war is the largest crime, and, starting in the mid-sixties, most of the best-known photographers covering wars set out to show war's "real" face. The color photographs of tormented Vietnamese villagers and wounded American conscripts that Larry Burrows took and *Life* published, starting in 1962, certainly fortified the outcry against the American presence in Vietnam. Burrows was the first important photographer to do a whole war in color—another gain in verisimilitude and shock.

In the current political mood, the friendliest to the military in decades, the pictures of wretched hollow-eyed G.I.s that once seemed subversive of militarism and imperialism may seem inspirational. Their revised subject: ordinary American young men doing their unpleasant, ennobling duty.

III

The iconography of suffering has a long pedigree. The suffering most often deemed worthy of representation is that which is understood to be the product of wrath, divine or human. (Suffering brought on by natural causes, such as illness or childbirth, is scantily represented in the history of art; that brought on by accident virtually not at all—as if there were no such thing as suffering by inadvertence or misadventure.) The statue group of the writhing Laocoön and his sons, the innumerable versions in painting and sculpture of the Passion of Christ, and the immense visual catalogue of the fiendish executions of the Christian martyrs—these are surely intended to move and excite, to instruct and exemplify. The viewer may commiserate with the sufferer's pain—and, in the case of the Christian saints, feel admonished or inspired by model faith and fortitude—but these are destinies beyond deploring or contesting.

It seems that the appetite for pictures showing bodies in pain is almost as keen as the desire for ones that show bodies naked. For a long time, in Christian art, depictions of Hell offered both of these elemental satisfactions. On occasion, the pretext might be a Biblical decapitation story (Holofernes, John the Baptist) or massacre yarn (the newborn Hebrew boys, the eleven thousand virgins) or some such, with the status of a real historical event and of an implacable fate. There was also the repertoire of hard-to-look-at cruelties from classical antiquity—the pagan myths, even more than the Christian stories, offer something for every taste. No moral charge attaches to the representation of these cruelties. Just the provocation: Can you look at this? There is the satisfaction at being able to look at the image without flinching. There is the pleasure of flinching.

To shudder at Goltzius's rendering, in his etching "The Dragon Devouring the Companions of Cadmus" (1588), of a man's face being chewed off his head is very different from shuddering at a photograph of a First World War veteran whose face has been shot away. One horror has its place in a complex subject—figures in a landscape—that displays the artist's skill of eye and hand. The other is a camera's record, from very near, of a real person's unspeakably awful mutilation; that and nothing else. An invented horror can be quite overwhelming. (I, for one, find it difficult to look at Titian's great painting of the flaying of Marsyas, or, indeed, at any picture of this subject.) But there is shame as well as shock in looking at the closeup of a real horror. Perhaps the only people with the right to look at images of suffering of this extreme order are those who could do something to alleviate it—say, the surgeons at the military hospital where the photograph was taken—or those who could learn from it. The rest of us are voyeurs, whether we like it or not.

In each instance, the gruesome invites us to be either spectators or cowards, unable to look. Those with the stomach to look are playing a role authorized by many glorious depictions of suffering. Torment, a canonical subject in art, is often represented in painting as a spectacle, something being watched (or ignored) by other people. The implication is: No, it cannot be stopped—and the mingling of inattentive with attentive onlookers underscores this.

The practice of representing atrocious suffering as something to be deplored, and, if possible, stopped, enters the history of images with a specific subject: the sufferings endured by a civilian population at the hands of a victorious army on the rampage. It is a quintessentially secular subject, which emerges in the seventeenth century, when contemporary realignments of power become material for artists. In 1633, Jacques Callot published a suite of eighteen etchings titled *The Miseries and Misfortunes of War*, which depicted the atrocities committed against civilians by French troops during the invasion and occupation of his native Lorraine in the early sixteen-thirties. (Six small etchings on the same subject that Callot had executed prior to the large series appeared in 1635, the year of his death.) The view is wide and deep; these are scenes with many figures, scenes from a history, and each caption is a sententious comment in verse on the various energies and dooms portrayed in the images. Callot begins with a plate showing the recruitment of soldiers; brings into view ferocious combat, massacre, pillage, and rape, the engines of torture and execution (strappado, gallows tree, firing squad, stake, wheel), and the revenge of the peasants on the soldiers; and ends with a distribution of rewards. The insistence in plate after plate on the savagery of a conquering army is startling and without precedent, but the French soldiers are only the leading malefactors in the orgy of violence, and there is room in Callot's Christian humanist sensibility not just to mourn the end of the independent Duchy of Lorraine but to record the postwar plight of destitute soldiers who squat on the side of the road, begging for alms.

Callot had his successors, such as Hans Ulrich Franck, a minor German artist who, in 1643, toward the end of the Thirty Years' War, began making what would be (by 1656) a suite of twenty-five etchings depicting soldiers killing peasants. But the preëminent concentration on the horrors of war and the vileness of soldiers run amok is Goya's, in the early nineteenth century. *The Disasters of War*, a numbered sequence of eighty-three etchings made between 1810 and 1820 (and first published, except for three plates, in 1863, thirty-five years after his death), depicts the atrocities perpetrated by Napoleon's soldiers, who invaded Spain in 1808 to quell the insurrection against French rule. Goya's images move the viewer close to the horror. All the trappings of the spectacular have been eliminated: the landscape is an atmosphere, a darkness, barely sketched in. War is not a spectacle. And Goya's print series is not a narrative: each image, captioned with a brief phrase lamenting the wickedness of the invaders and the monstrousness of the suffering they inflicted, stands independent of the

NOW SHOWING

"I warned you it was lighthearted holiday fare!"

"Some freshly mined salt?"

others. The cumulative effect is devastating.

The ghoulish cruelties in *The Disasters of War* are meant to awaken, shock, wound the viewer. Goya's art, like Dostoyevsky's, seems a turning point in the history of moral feelings and of sorrow—as deep, as original, as demanding. With Goya, a new standard for responsiveness to suffering enters art. (And new subjects for fellow-feeling: for example, the painting of an injured laborer being carried away from a construction site.) The account of war's cruelties is constructed as an assault on the sensibility of the viewer. The expressive phrases in script below each image comment on the provocation. While the image, like all images, is an invitation to look, the caption, more often than not, insists on the difficulty of doing just that. A voice, presumably the artist's, badgers the viewer: Can you bear this? One caption declares, "*No se puede mirar*" ("One can't look"). Another says, "*Esto es malo*" ("This is bad"). "*Esto es peor*" ("This is worse"), another retorts.

The caption of a photograph is traditionally neutral, informative: a date, a place, names. A reconnaissance photograph from the First World War (the first war in which cameras were used extensively for military intelligence) was unlikely to be captioned "Can't wait to overrun this!" or the X-ray of a multiple fracture to be annotated "Patient will probably have a limp!" It seems no less inappropriate to speak for the photograph in the photographer's voice, offering assurances of the image's veracity, as Goya does in *The Disasters of War*, writing beneath one image, "*Yo lo vi*" ("I saw this"). And beneath another, "*Esto es lo verdadero*" ("This is the truth"). Of course the photographer saw it. And, unless there's been some tampering or misrepresenting, it is the truth.

Ordinary language fixes the difference between handmade images like Goya's and photographs through the convention that artists "make" drawings and paintings while photographers "take" photographs. But the photographic image, even to the extent that it is a trace (not a construction made out of disparate photographic traces), cannot be simply a transparency of something that happened. It is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude. Moreover, fiddling with the picture long antedates the era of digital photography and Photoshop manipulations: it has always been possible for a photograph to misrepresent. A painting or drawing is judged a fake when it turns out not to be by the artist to whom it had been attributed. A photograph—or a filmed document available on television or the Internet—is judged a fake when it turns out to be deceiving the viewer about the scene it purports to depict.

That the atrocities perpetrated by Napoleon's soldiers in Spain didn't happen exactly as Goya drew them hardly disqualifies *The Disasters of War*. Goya's images are a synthesis. Things *like* this happened. In contrast, a single photograph or filmstrip claims to represent exactly what was before the camera's lens. A photograph is supposed not to evoke but to show. That is why photographs, unlike handmade images, can count as evidence. But evidence of what? The suspicion that Capa's "Death of a Republican Soldier"—recently retitled "The Falling Soldier," in the authoritative compilation of Capa's work—may not show what it has always been said to show continues to haunt discussions of war photography. Everyone is a literalist when it comes to photographs.

Images of the sufferings endured in war are so widely disseminated now that it is easy to forget that, historically, photographers have offered mostly positive images of the warrior's trade, and of the satisfactions of starting a war or continuing to fight one. If governments had their way, war photography, like much war poetry, would drum up support for soldiers' sacrifices. Indeed, war photography begins with such a mission, such a disgrace. The war was the Crimean War, and the photographer, Roger Fenton, invariably called the first war photographer, was no less than that war's "official" photographer, having been sent to the Crimea in early 1855 by the British government, at the instigation of Prince Albert. Acknowledging the need to counteract the alarming printed accounts of the dangers and privations endured by the British soldiers dispatched there the previous year, the government invited a well-known professional photographer to give another, more positive impression of the increasingly unpopular war.

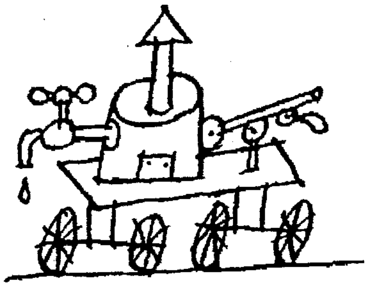
Edmund Gosse, in *Father and Son*, his memoir of a mid-nineteenth-century English childhood, relates how the Crimean War penetrated even his stringently pious, unworldly family, which belonged to an evangelical sect called the Plymouth Brethren: "The declaration of war with Russia brought the first breath of outside life into our Calvinist cloister.

My parents took in a daily newspaper, which they had never done before, and events in picturesque places, which my Father and I looked out on the map, were eagerly discussed." War was, and still is, the most irresistible—and picturesque—news, along with that invaluable substitute for war, international sports. But this war was more than news. It was bad news. The authoritative, pictureless London newspaper to which Gosse's parents had succumbed, the *Times*, attacked the military leadership whose incompetence was responsible for the war's dragging on, with so much loss of British life. The toll on the soldiers from causes other than combat was horrendous—twenty-two thousand died of illnesses; many thousands lost limbs to frostbite during the long Russian winter of the protracted siege of Sebastopol—and several of the military engagements were disasters. It was still winter when Fenton arrived in the Crimea for a four-month stay, having contracted to publish his photographs (in the form of engravings) in a less venerable and less critical weekly paper, the *Illustrated London News*, exhibit them in a gallery, and market them as a book upon his return home.

Under instructions from the War Office not to photograph the dead, the maimed, or the ill, and precluded from photographing most other subjects by the cumbersome technology of picture-taking, Fenton went about rendering the war as a dignified all-male group outing. With each image requiring a separate chemical preparation in the darkroom and a long exposure time, he could photograph British officers in open-air staff meetings or common soldiers tending the cannons only after asking them to stand or sit together, follow his directions, and hold still. His pictures are tableaux of military life behind the front lines; the war—movement, disorder, drama—stays off-camera. The one photograph Fenton took in the Crimea that reaches beyond benign documentation is "The Valley of the Shadow of Death," whose title evokes the consolation offered by the Biblical Psalmist as well as the disaster in which six hundred British soldiers were ambushed on the plain above Balaklava—Tennyson called the site "the valley of Death" in his memorial poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade." Fenton's memorial photograph is a portrait of absence, of death without the dead. It is the only photograph that would not have needed to be staged, for all it shows is a wide rutted road, studded with rocks and cannonballs, that curves onward across a barren rolling plain to the distant void.

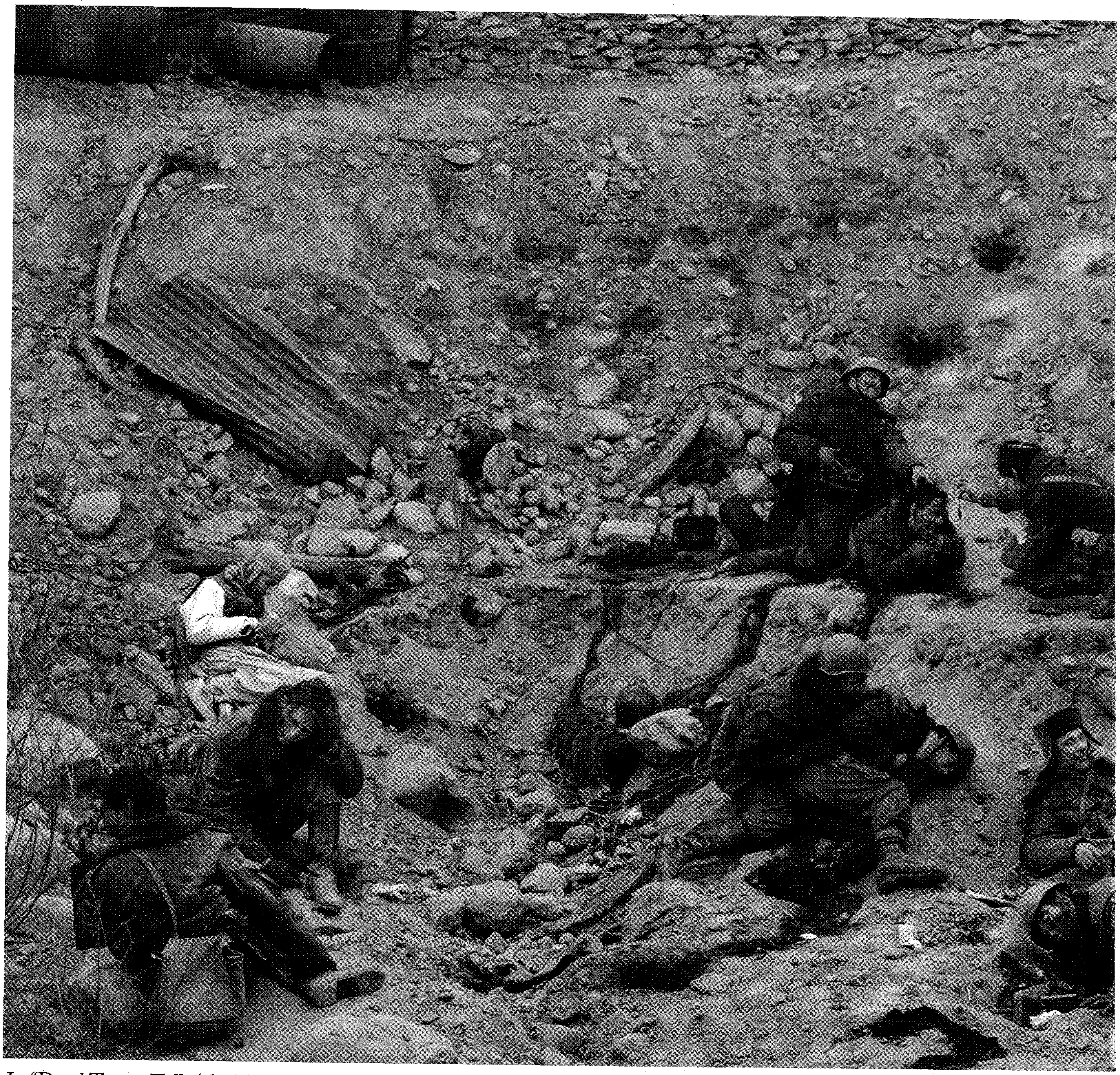
A bolder portfolio of after-the-battle images of death and ruin, pointing not to losses suffered but to a fearsome British triumph over the enemy, was made by another photographer who had visited the Crimean War. Felice Beato, a naturalized Englishman (he was born in Venice), was the first photographer to attend a number of wars: besides being in the Crimea in 1855, he was at the Sepoy Rebellion (what the British call the Indian Mutiny) in 1857-58, the Second Opium War in China, in 1860, and the Sudanese colonial wars in 1885. Three years after Fenton made his anodyne images of a war that did not go well for England, Beato was celebrating the fierce victory of the British Army over a mutiny of native soldiers under its command, the first important challenge to British rule in India. Beato's "Ruins of Sikandarbagh Palace," an arresting photograph of a palace in Lucknow that has been gutted by bombardment, shows the courtyard strewn with the rebels' bones.

The first full-scale attempt to document a war was carried out a few years later, during the American Civil War, by a firm of Northern photographers headed by Mathew Brady, who had made several official portraits of President Lincoln. The Brady war pictures—most were shot by Alexander Gardner and Timothy O'Sullivan, although their employer was invariably credited with them—showed conventional subjects, such as encampments populated by officers and foot soldiers, towns in war's way, ordnance, ships, and also, most famously, dead Union and Confederate soldiers lying on the blasted ground of Gettysburg and Antietam. Though access to the battlefield came as a privilege extended to Brady and his team by Lincoln himself, the photographers were not commissioned, as Fenton had been. Their status evolved in rather typical American fashion, with nominal government sponsorship giving way to the force of entrepreneurial and freelance motives.



The first justification for the brutally legible pictures of a field of dead soldiers was the simple duty to record. "The camera is the eye of history," Brady is supposed to have said. And history, invoked as truth beyond appeal, was allied with the rising prestige of a certain notion of subjects needing more attention, known as realism, which was soon to have a host of defenders among novelists as well as photographers. In the name of realism, one was permitted—required—to show unpleasant, hard facts. Such pictures also convey "a useful moral" by showing "the blank horror and reality of war, in opposition to its pageantry," as Gardner wrote in a text accompanying O'Sullivan's picture of fallen Confederate soldiers, their agonized faces clearly visible. "Here are the dreadful details! Let them aid in preventing another such calamity falling upon the nation." But the frankness of the most memorable pictures in an album of photographs by Gardner and other Brady photographers, which Gardner published after the war, did not mean that he and his colleagues had necessarily photographed their subjects as they found them. To photograph was to compose (with living subjects, to pose); the desire to arrange elements in the picture did not vanish because the subject was immobilized, or immobile.

Not surprisingly, many of the canonical images of early war photography turn out to have been staged, or to have had their subjects tampered with. Roger Fenton, after reaching the much shelled valley near Sebastopol in his horse-drawn darkroom, made two exposures from the same tripod position: in the first version of the celebrated photograph he was to call "The Valley of the Shadow of Death" (despite the title, it was not across this landscape that the Light Brigade made its doomed charge), the cannonballs are thick on the ground to the left of the road; before taking the second picture—the one that is always



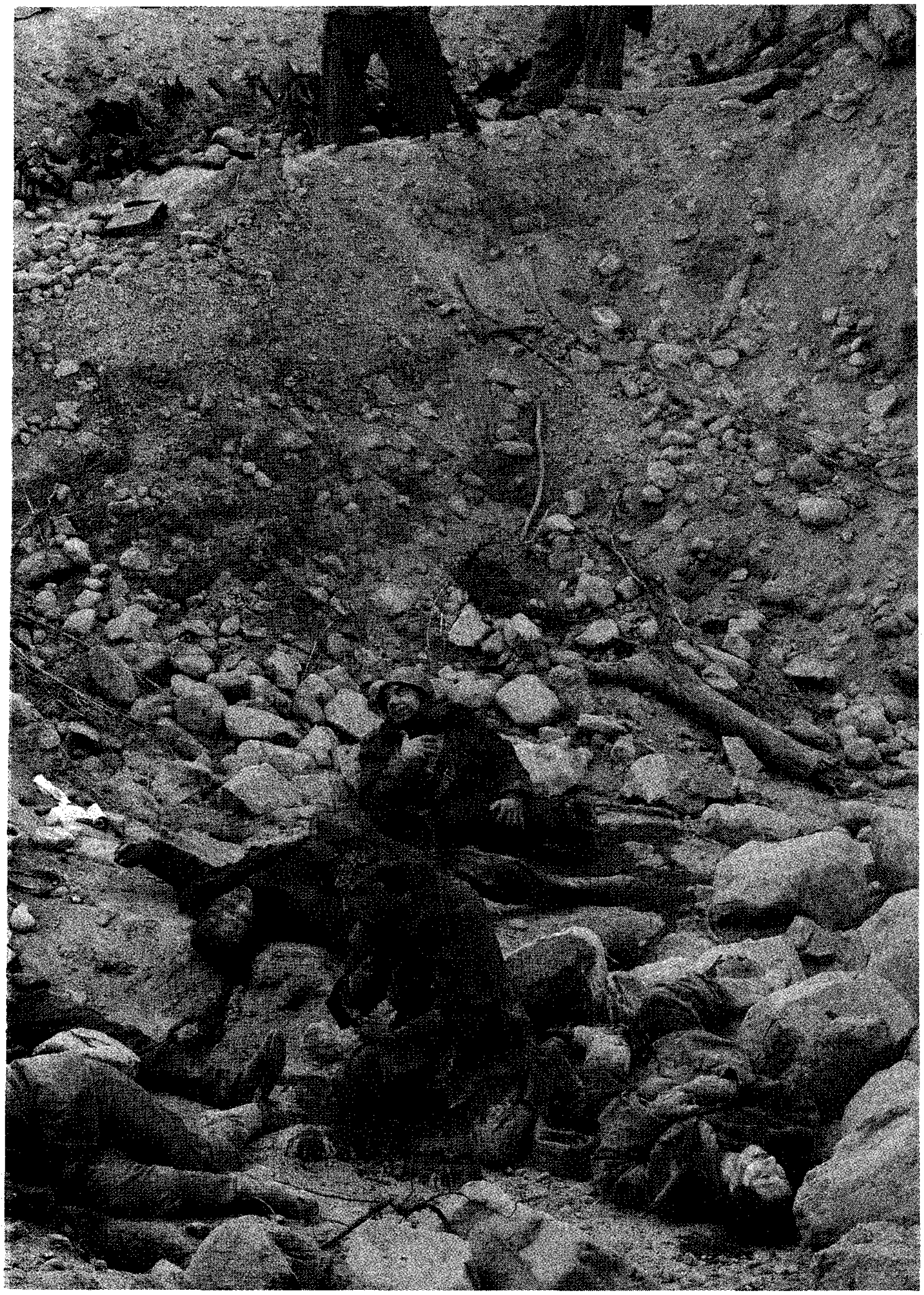
In "Dead Troops Talk (A vision after an ambush of a Red Army patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, winter 1986)," which was made i

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

reproduced—he oversaw the scattering of cannonballs on the road itself. A picture of a desolate site where a great deal of dying had indeed recently taken place, Beato's "Ruins of Sikandarbagh Palace," involved a more thorough theatricalization of its subject, and was one of the first attempts to suggest with a camera the horrific in war. The attack occurred in November, 1857, after which the victorious British troops and loyal Indian units searched the palace room by room, bayoneting the eighteen hundred surviving Sepoy defenders who were now their prisoners and throwing their bodies into the courtyard; vultures and dogs did the rest. For the photograph he took in March or April, 1858, Beato constructed the courtyard as a deathscape, stationing some natives by two pillars in the rear and distributing human bones about the foreground.

At least they were old bones. It's now known that the Brady team rearranged and displaced some of the recently dead at Gettysburg; the picture titled "The Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter, Gettysburg" in fact shows a dead Confederate soldier who was moved from where he had fallen on the field to a more photogenic site, a cove formed by several boulders flanking a barricade of rocks, and includes a prop rifle that Gardner leaned against the barricade beside the corpse. (It seems not to have been the special rifle a sharpshooter would have used, but a common infantryman's rifle; Gardner didn't know this or didn't care.)

Only starting with the Vietnam War can we be virtually certain that none of the best-known photographs were setups. And this is essential to the moral authority of these images. The signature Vietnam War horror photograph, from 1972, taken by Huynh Cong Ut, of children from a village that has just been doused with American napalm running down the highway, shrieking



1992, Jeff Wall imagines an event in the recent Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

with pain, belongs to the universe of photographs that cannot possibly be posed. The same is true of the well-known pictures from the most widely photographed wars since.

That there have been so few staged war photographs since the Vietnam War probably should not be attributed to higher standards of journalistic probity. One part of the explanation is that it was in Vietnam that television became the defining medium for showing images of war, and the intrepid lone photographer, Nikon or Leica in hand, operating out of sight much of the time, now had to compete with, and endure the proximity of, TV crews. There are always witnesses to a filming. Technically, the possibilities for doctoring or electronically manipulating pictures are greater than ever—almost unlimited. But the practice of inventing dramatic news pictures, staging them for the camera, seems on its way to becoming a lost art.

IV

Central to modern expectations, and modern ethical feeling, is the conviction that war is an aberration, if an unstoppable one. That peace is the norm, if an unattainable one. This, of course, is not the way war has been regarded throughout history. War has been the norm and peace the exception.

Descriptions of the exact fashion in which bodies are injured and killed in combat is a recurring climax in the stories told in the *Iliad.* War is seen as something men do, inveterately, undeterred by the accumulation of suffering it inflicts; to represent war in words or in pictures requires a keen, unflinching detachment. When Leonardo da Vinci gives instructions for a battle painting, his worry is that artists will lack the courage or the imagination to show war in all its ghastliness: "Make the conquered and beaten pale, with brows raised and knit, and the skin above their brows furrowed with pain . . . and the teeth apart as with crying out in lamentation. . . . Make the dead partly or entirely covered with dust . . . and let the blood be seen by its color flowing in a sinuous stream from the corpse to the dust. Others in the death agony grinding their teeth, rolling their eyes, with their fists clenched against their bodies, and the legs distorted." The concern is that the images won't be sufficiently upsetting: not concrete, not detailed enough.

Pity can entail a moral judgment if, as Aristotle suggests, pity is considered to be the emotion that we owe only to those enduring undeserved misfortune. But pity, far from being the natural twin of fear in the dramas of catastrophic misfortune, seems diluted—distracted—by fear, while fear (dread, terror) usually manages to swamp pity. Leonardo is suggesting that the artist's gaze be, literally, pitiless. The image should appall, and in that *terribilità* lies a challenging kind of beauty.

That a gory battlescape could be beautiful—in the sublime or awesome or tragic register of the beautiful—is a commonplace about images of war made by artists. The idea does not sit well when applied to images taken by cameras: to find beauty in war photographs seems heartless. But the landscape of devastation is still a landscape. There is beauty in ruins. To acknowledge the beauty of photographs of the World Trade Center ruins in the months following the attack seemed frivolous, sacrilegious. The most people dared say was that the photographs were "surreal," a hectic euphemism behind which the disgraced notion of beauty cowered. But they *were* beautiful, many of them—by veteran photographers such as Gilles Peress, Susan Meiselas, and Joel Meyerowitz and by many little-known and nonprofessional photographers. The site itself, the mass graveyard that had received the name Ground Zero, was, of course, anything but beautiful. Photographs tend to transform, whatever their subject; and as an image something may be beautiful—or terrifying, or unbearable, or quite bearable—as it is not in real life.

Transforming is what art does, but photography that bears witness to the calamitous and the reprehensible is much criticized if it seems "aesthetic"; that is, too much like art. The dual powers of photography—to generate documents and to create works of visual art—have produced some remarkable exaggerations about what photographers ought or ought not to do. These days, most exaggeration is of the puritanical kind. Photographs that depict suffering shouldn't be beautiful, as captions shouldn't moralize. In this view, a beautiful photograph drains attention from the sobering subject and turns it toward the medium itself, inviting the viewer to look "aesthetically," and thereby compromising the picture's status as a document. The photograph gives mixed signals. Stop this, it urges. But it also exclaims, What a spectacle!

Take one of the most poignant images from the First World War: a column of English soldiers blinded by poison gas—each rests his hand on the shoulder of the man ahead of him—stumbling toward a dressing station. It could be an image from one of the searing movies made about the war—King Vidor's *The Big Parade*, of 1925, or G. W. Pabst's *Westfront 1918*, Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and Howard Hawks's *Dawn Patrol*, all from 1930. The way in which still photography finds its perfection in the reconstruction of battle scenes in the great war movies has begun to backfire on the photography of war. What assured the authenticity of Steven Spielberg's much admired re-creation of the Omaha Beach landing on D Day in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) was that it was based on, among other sources, the photographs taken with immense bravery by Robert Capa during the landing. But a war photograph seems inauthentic, even though there is nothing staged about it, when it looks like a still from a movie. Sebastião Salgado, a photographer who specializes in world misery (including but not restricted to the effects of war), has been the principal target of the new campaign against the inauthenticity of the beautiful. Particularly with the seven-year project he calls "Migrations: Humanity in Transition," Salgado has come under steady attack for producing spectacular, beautifully composed big pictures that are said to be "cinematic."

The sanctimonious Family of Man-style rhetoric that accompanies Salgado's exhibitions and books has worked to the detriment of the pictures, however unfair this may be. The pictures have also been sourly treated in response to the highly commercialized situations in which, typically, Salgado's portraits of misery are seen. But the problem is in the pictures themselves, not the way they are exhibited: in their focus on the powerless, reduced to their powerlessness. It is significant that the powerless are not named in the captions. A portrait that declines to name its subject becomes complicit, if inadvertently, in the cult of celebrity that has fuelled an insatiable appetite for the opposite sort of photograph: to grant only the famous their names demotes the rest to representative instances of their occupations, their ethnicities, their plights. Taken in thirty-five countries, Salgado's migration pictures group together, under this single heading, a host of different causes and kinds of distress. Making suffering loom larger, by globalizing it, may spur people to feel they ought to "care" more. It also invites them to feel that the sufferings and misfortunes are too vast, too irrevocable, too epic to be much changed by any local, political intervention. With a subject conceived on this scale, compassion can only flounder—and make abstract. But all politics, like all history, is concrete.

It used to be thought, when candid images were not common, that showing something that needed to be seen, bringing a painful reality closer, was bound to goad viewers to feel—feel more. In a world in which photography is brilliantly at the service of consumerist manipulations, this naïve relation to poignant scenes of suffering is much less plausible. Morally alert photographers and ideologues of photography are concerned with the issues of exploitation of sentiment (pity, compassion, indignation) in war photography, and how to avoid rote ways of arousing feeling.

Photographer-witnesses may try to make the spectacular *not* spectacular. But their efforts can never cancel the tradition in which suffering has been understood throughout most of Western history. To feel the pulse of Christian iconography in certain wartime or disaster-time photographs is not a sentimental projection. It would be hard not to discern the lineaments of the Pietà in W. Eugene Smith's picture of a woman in Minamata cradling her deformed, blind, and deaf daughter, or the template of the Descent from the Cross in several of Don McCullin's pictures of dying American soldiers in Vietnam.

The problem is not that people remember through photographs but that they remember only the photographs. This remembering through photographs eclipses other forms of understanding—and remembering. The concentration camps—that is, the photographs taken when the camps were liberated, in 1945—are most of what people associate with Nazism and the miseries of the Second World War. Hideous deaths (by genocide, starvation, and epidemic) are most of what people retain of the clutch of iniquities and failures that have taken place in postcolonial Africa.

To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture. Even a writer as steeped in nineteenth-century and early-modern literary solemnities as W. G. Sebald was moved to seed his lamentation-narratives of lost lives, lost nature, lost cityscapes with photographs. Sebald was not just an elegist; he was a militant elegist. Remembering, he wanted the reader to remember, too.

Harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they don't help us much to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us. Consider one of the most unforgettable images of the war in Bosnia, a photograph of which the *New York Times* foreign correspondent John Kifner wrote, "The image is stark, one of the most enduring of the Balkan wars: a Serb militiaman casually kicking a dying Muslim woman in the head. It tells you everything you need to know." But of course it doesn't tell us everything we need to know.

From the identification supplied by the photographer, Ron Haviv, we learn that the photograph was taken in the town of Bijeljina in April, 1992, the first month of the Serb rampage through Bosnia. From behind, we see a uniformed Serb soldier, a youthful figure with sunglasses perched on the top of his head, a cigarette between the second and third fingers of his raised left hand, rifle dangling in his right hand, right leg poised to kick a woman lying face down on the sidewalk between two other bodies. The photograph doesn't tell us that she is Muslim, but she is not likely to have been labelled in any other way, or why would she and the two others be lying there, as if dead (why "dying"?), under the gaze of some Serb soldiers? In fact, the photograph tells us very little—except that war is hell, and that graceful young men with guns are capable of kicking in the head overweight older women lying helpless, or already killed.

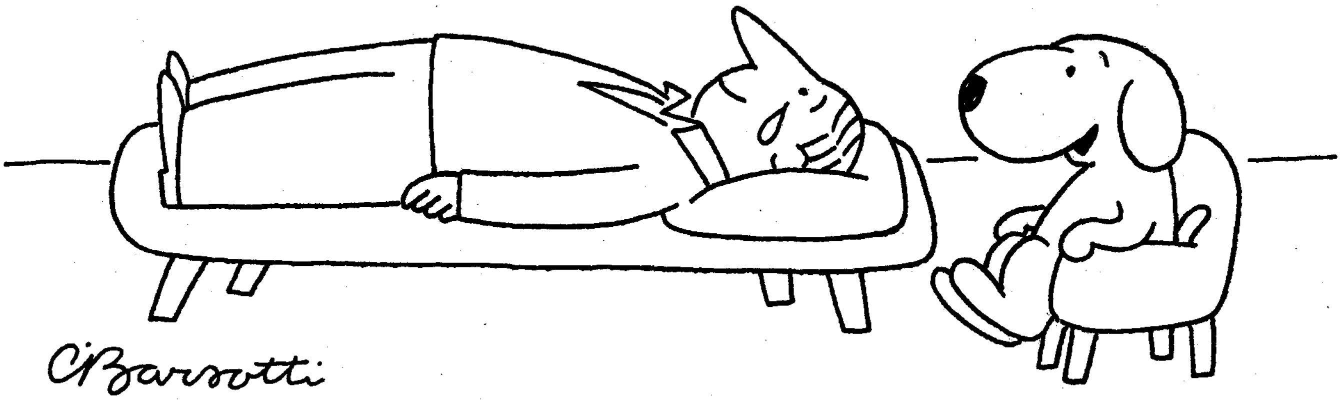
The pictures of Bosnian atrocities were seen soon after they took place. Like pictures from the Vietnam War, such as Ron Haberle's documents of the massacre by a company of American soldiers of some five hundred unarmed civilians in the village of My Lai in March, 1968, they became important in bolstering indignation at this war which had been far from inevitable, far from intractable; and could have been stopped much sooner. Therefore one could feel an obligation to look at these pictures, gruesome as they were, because there was something to be done, right now, about what they depicted. Other issues are raised when the public is invited to respond to a dossier of hitherto unknown pictures of horrors long past.

An example: a trove of photographs of black victims of lynching in small towns in the United States between the eighteen-nineties and the nineteen-thirties, which provided a shattering, revelatory experience for the thousands who saw them in a gallery in New York in 2000. The lynching pictures tell us about human wickedness. About inhumanity. They force us to think about the extent of the evil unleashed specifically by racism. Intrinsic to the perpetration of this evil is the shamelessness of photographing it. The pictures were taken as souvenirs and made, some of them, into postcards; more than a few show grinning spectators, good churchgoing citizens, as most of them had to be, posing for a camera with the backdrop of a naked, charred, mutilated body hanging from a tree. The display of the pictures makes us spectators, too.

What is the point of exhibiting these pictures? To awaken indignation? To make us feel "bad"; that is, to appall and sadden? To help us mourn? Is looking at such pictures really necessary, given that these horrors lie in a past remote enough to be beyond punishment? Are we the better for seeing these images? Do they actually teach us anything? Don't they rather just confirm what we already know (or want to know)?

All these questions were raised at the time of the exhibition and afterward when a book of the photographs, *Without Sanctuary*, was published. Some people, it was said, might dispute the need for this grisly photographic display, lest it cater to voyeuristic appetites and perpetuate images of black victimization—or simply numb the mind. Nevertheless, it was argued, there is an obligation to "examine"—the more clinical "examine" is substituted for "look at"—the pictures. It was further argued that submitting to the ordeal should help us understand such atrocities not as the acts of "barbarians" but as the reflection of a belief system, racism, that by defining one people as less human than another legitimatizes torture and murder. But maybe they *were* barbarians. Maybe *this* is what barbarians look like. (They look like everybody else.)

That being said, whom do we wish to blame? More precisely, whom do we believe we have the right to blame? The children of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were no less innocent than the young African-American men (and a few women) who were butchered and hanged from trees in small-town America. More than a hundred thousand German civilians, three-fourths of them women, were incinerated in the R.A.F. fire bombing of Dresden on the night of February 13, 1945; seventy-two thousand civilians were killed by the American bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The roll call could be much longer. Again, whom do we wish to blame? What atrocities from the incur-



"Well, I think you're wonderful."

"How about a little music to push the plot along."

able past do we think we are obliged to see?

Probably, if we are Americans, we think that it would be "morbid" to go out of our way to look at pictures of burned victims of atomic bombing or the napalmed flesh of the civilian victims of the American war on Vietnam but that we have some kind of duty to look at the lynching pictures—if we belong to the party of the right-thinking, which on this issue is now large. A stepped-up recognition of the monstrousness of the slave system that once existed, unquestioned by most, in the United States is a national project of recent decades that many Euro-Americans feel some tug of obligation to join. This ongoing project is a great achievement, a benchmark of civic virtue. But acknowledgment of American use of disproportionate firepower in war (in violation of one of the cardinal laws of war) is very much not a national project. A museum devoted to the history of America's wars that included the vicious war the United States fought against guerrillas in the Philippines from 1899 to 1902 (expertly excoriated by Mark Twain), and that fairly presented the arguments for and against using the atomic bomb in 1945 on the Japanese cities, with photographic evidence that showed what those weapons did, would be regarded—now more than ever—as an unpatriotic endeavor.

V

Consider two widespread ideas—now fast approaching the stature of platitudes—on the impact of photography. Since I find these ideas formulated in my own essays on photography, the earliest of which was written thirty years ago, I feel an irresistible temptation to quarrel with them.

The first idea is that public attention is steered by the attentions of the media—which means images. When there are photographs, a war becomes "real." Thus, the protest against the Vietnam War was mobilized by images. The feeling that something had to be done about the war in Bosnia was built from the attentions of journalists: "the CNN effect," it was sometimes called, which brought images of Sarajevo under siege into hundreds of millions of living rooms night after night for more than three years. These examples illustrate the determining influence of photographs in shaping what catastrophes and crises we pay attention to, what we care about, and ultimately what evaluations are placed on these conflicts.

The second idea—it might seem the converse of what has just been described—is that in a world saturated, even hypersaturated, with images, those which should matter to us have a diminishing effect: we become callous. In the end, such images make us a little less able to feel, to have our conscience pricked.

In the first of the six essays in *On Photography*, which was published in 1977, I argued that while an event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs, after repeated exposure it also becomes less real. As much as they create sympathy, I wrote, photographs shrivel sympathy. Is this true? I thought it was when I wrote it. I'm not so sure now. What is the evidence that photographs have a diminishing impact, that our culture of spectacle neutralizes the moral force of photographs of atrocities?

The question turns on a view of the principal medium of the news, television. An image is drained of its force by the way it is used, where and how often it is seen. Images shown on television are, by definition, images of which, sooner or later, one tires. What looks like callousness has its origin in the instability of attention that television is organized to arouse and to satiate, by its surfeit of images. Image-glut keeps attention light, mobile, relatively indifferent to content. Image-flow precludes a privileged image. The whole point of television is that one can switch channels, that it is normal to switch channels: to become restless, bored. Consumers droop. They need to be restimulated, jump-started, again and again. Content is no more than one of these stimulants. A more reflective engagement with content would require a certain intensity of awareness—just what is weakened by the expectations brought to images disseminated by the media. The leaching out of content is what contributes most to the deadening of feeling.

The argument that modern life consists of a menu of horrors by which we are corrupted and to which we gradually become habituated is a founding idea of the critique of modernity—a tradition almost as old as modernity itself. In 1800, Wordsworth, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, denounced the corruption of sensibility produced by "the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies." This process of overstimulation acts "to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind" and "reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor."

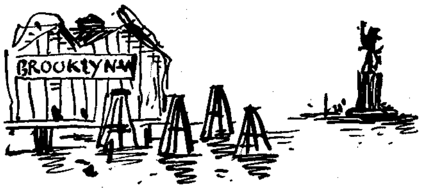
Wordsworth singled out the blunting of mind produced by "daily" events and "hourly" news of "extraordinary incident." (In 1800!) Exactly what kind of events and incidents was discreetly left to the reader's imagination. Some sixty years later, another great poet and cultural diagnostician—French, and therefore as licensed to be hyperbolic as the English are prone to understate—offered a more heated version of the same charge. Here is Baudelaire writing in his journal in the early eighteen-sixties: "It is impossible to glance through any newspaper, no matter what the day, the month or the year, without finding on every line the most frightful traces of human perversity. . . . Every newspaper, from the first line to the last, is nothing but a tissue of horrors. Wars, crimes, thefts, lecheries, tortures, the evil deeds of princes, of nations, of private individuals; an orgy of universal atrocity. And it is with this loathsome appetizer that civilized man daily washes down his morning repast."

Newspapers did not yet carry photographs when Baudelaire wrote. But this doesn't make his accusatory description of the bourgeois sitting down with his morning newspaper to breakfast with an array of the world's horrors any different from the contemporary critique of how much desensitizing horror we take in every day, via television as well as the morning paper. Newer technology provides a non-stop feed: as many images of disaster and atrocity as we can make time to look at.

Since *On Photography* was published, many critics have suggested that the agonies of war—thanks to television—have devolved into a nightly banality. Flooded with images of the sort that once used to shock and arouse indignation, we are losing our capacity to react. Compassion, stretched to its limits, is going numb. So runs the familiar diagnosis. But what is really being asked for here? That images of carnage be cut back to, say, once a week? More generally, that we work toward an "ecology of images," as I suggested in *On Photography*? But there *isn't* going to be an ecology of images. No Committee of Guardians is going to ration horror, to keep fresh its ability to shock. And the horrors themselves are not going to abate.

The view proposed in *On Photography*—that our capacity to respond to our experiences with emotional freshness and ethical pertinence is being sapped by the relentless diffusion of vulgar and appalling images—might be called the conservative critique of the diffusion of such images. I call this argument "conservative" because it is the sense of reality that is eroded. There is still a reality that exists independent of the attempts to weaken its authority. The argument is in fact a defense of reality and the imperilled standards for responding to it more fully. In the more radical—cynical—spin on this critique, there is nothing to defend, for, paradoxical as it may sound, there is no reality anymore. The vast maw of modernity has chewed up reality and spat the whole mess out as images. According to a highly influential analysis, we live in a "society of spectacle." Each thing has to be turned into a spectacle to be real—that is, interesting—to us. People themselves become images: celebrities. Reality has abdicated. There are only representations: media.

Fancy rhetoric, this. And very persuasive to many, because one of the characteristics of modernity is that people like to feel they can anticipate their own experience. (This view is associated in particular with the writings of the late Guy Debord, who thought he was describing an illusion, a hoax, and of Jean Baudrillard, who claims to believe that images, simulated realities, are all that exists now; it seems to be something of a French specialty.) It is common to say that war, like everything else that seems to be real, is *médiatique*. This was the diagnosis of several distinguished French day-trippers to Sarajevo during the siege, among them André Glucksmann: that the war would be won or lost not by anything that happened in Sarajevo, or Bosnia generally, but by what happened in the media. It is often asserted that "the West" has increasingly come to see war itself as a spectacle. Reports of the death of reality—like the death of reason, the death of the intellectual, the death of serious literature—seem to have been accepted without much reflection by many who are attempting to understand what feels wrong, or empty, or idiotically triumphant in contemporary politics and culture.



To speak of reality becoming a spectacle is a breathtaking provincialism. It universalizes the viewing habits of a small, educated population living in the rich part of the world, where news has been converted into entertainment—a mature style of viewing that is a prime acquisition of the "modern," and a prerequisite for dismantling traditional forms of party-based politics that offer real disagreement and debate. It assumes that everyone is a spectator. It suggests, perversely, unseriously, that there is no real suffering in the world. But it is absurd to identify "the world" with those zones in the rich countries where people have the dubious privilege of being spectators, or of declining to be spectators, of other people's pain, just as it is absurd to generalize about the ability to respond to the sufferings of others on the basis of the mind-set of those consumers of news who know nothing at first hand about war and terror. There are hundreds of millions of television watchers who are far from inured to what they see on television. They do not have the luxury of patronizing reality.

VI

Is there an antidote to the perennial seductiveness of war? And is this a question a woman is more likely to pose than a man? (Probably yes.)

Could one be mobilized actively to

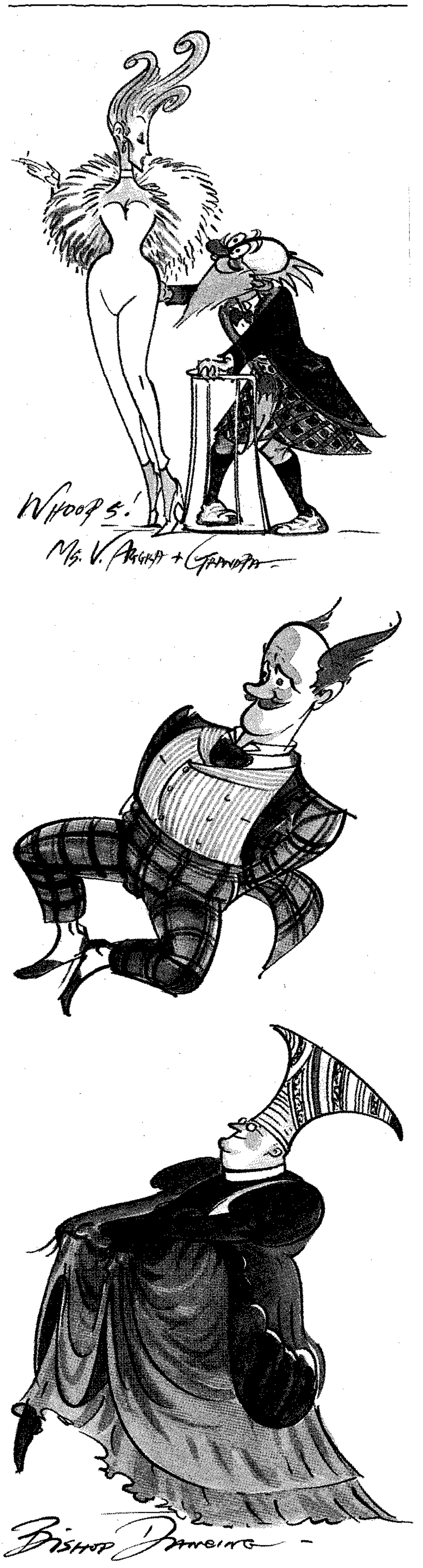
oppose war by an image (or a group of images), as one might be enrolled among the opponents of capital punishment by reading, say, Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* or Turgenev's "The Execution of Troppmann," an account of a night spent with a notorious criminal who is about to be guillotined? A narrative seems likely to be more effective than an image. Partly it is a question of the length of time one is obliged to look, and to feel. No photograph, or portfolio of photographs, can unfold, go further, and further still, as does *The Ascent* (1977), by the Ukrainian director Larisa Shepitko, the most affecting film about the horror of war I know.

Among single antiwar images, the huge photograph that Jeff Wall made in 1992 entitled "Dead Troops Talk (A vision after an ambush of a Red Army Patrol, near Moqor, Afghanistan, winter 1986)" seems to me exemplary in its thoughtfulness, coherence, and passion. The antithesis of a document, the picture, a Cibachrome transparency seven and a half feet high and more than thirteen feet wide and mounted on a light box, shows figures posed in a landscape, a blasted hillside, that was constructed in the artist's studio. Wall, who is Canadian, was never in Afghanistan. The ambush is a made-up event in a conflict he had read about. His imagination of war (he cites Goya as an inspiration) is in the tradition of nineteenth-century history painting and other forms of history-as-spectacle that emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—just before the invention of the camera—such as tableaux vivants, wax displays, dioramas, and panoramas, which made the past, especially the immediate past, seem astonishingly, disturbingly real.

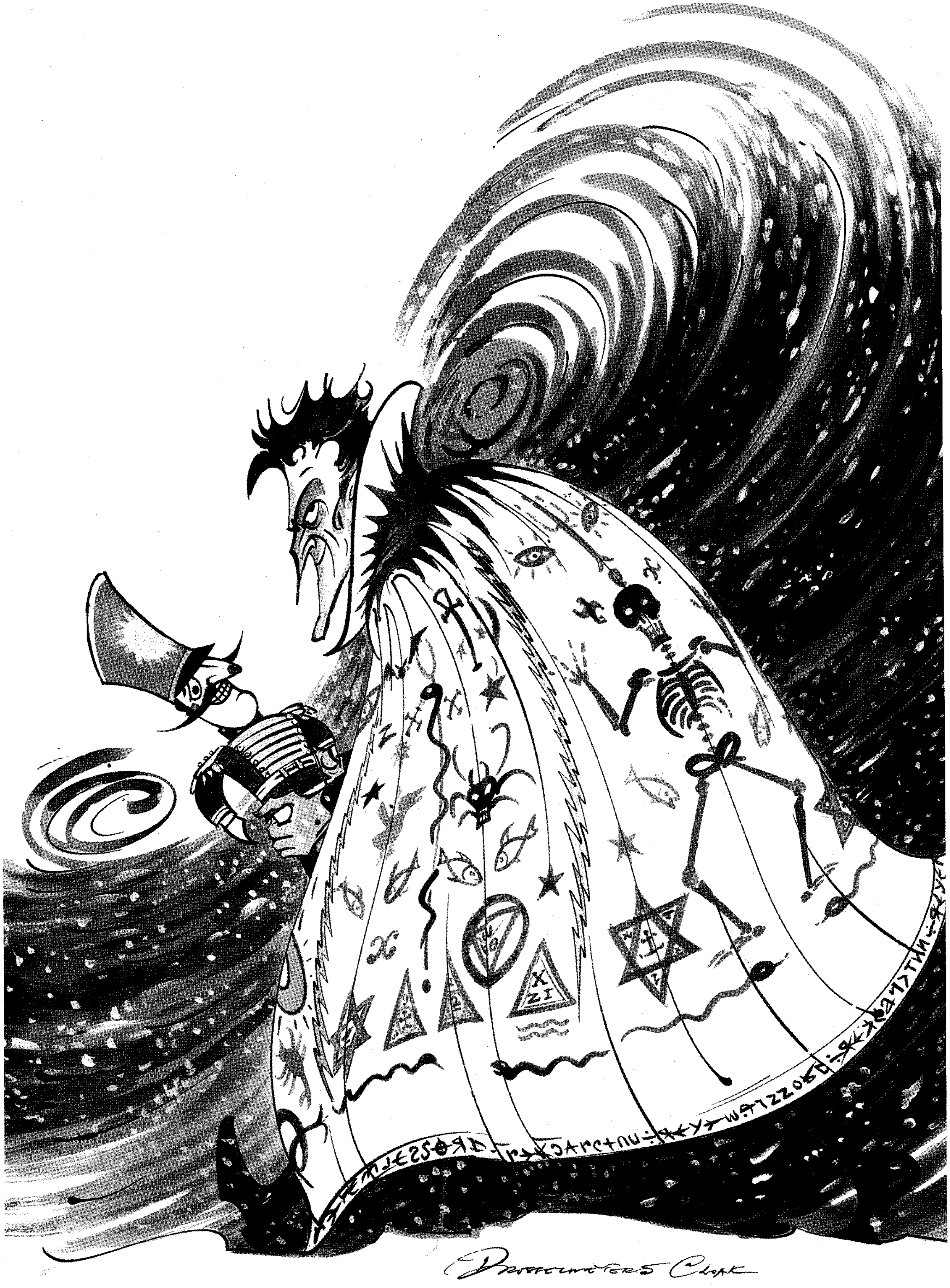
The figures in Wall's visionary photowork are "realistic," but, of course, the image is not. Dead soldiers don't talk. Here they do.

Thirteen Russian soldiers in bulky winter uniforms and high boots are scattered about a pocked, blood-splashed pit lined with loose rocks and the litter of war: shell casings, crumpled metal, a boot that holds the lower part of a leg. The soldiers, slaughtered in the Soviet Union's own late folly of a colonial war, were never buried. A few still have their helmets on. The head of one kneeling figure, talking animatedly, foams with his red brain matter. The atmosphere is warm, convivial, fraternal. Some slouch, leaning on an elbow, or sit, chatting, their opened skulls and destroyed hands on view. One man bends over another, who lies on his side in a posture of heavy sleep, perhaps encouraging him to sit up. Three men are horsing around: one with a huge wound in his belly straddles another, who is lying prone, while the third, kneeling, dangles what might be a watch before the laughing man on his stomach. One soldier, helmeted, legless, has turned to a comrade some distance away, an alert smile on his face. Below him are two who don't seem quite up to the resurrection and lie supine, their bloodied heads hanging down the stony incline.

Engulfed by the image, which is so accusatory, one could fantasize that the soldiers might turn and talk to us. But no, no one is looking out of the picture at the viewer. There's no threat of protest. They're not about to yell at us to bring a halt to that abomination which is war. They are not represented as terrifying to others, for among them (far left) sits a white-garbed Afghan scavenger, entirely absorbed in going through somebody's kit bag, of whom they take no note, and entering the picture above them (top right), on the path winding down the slope, are two Afghans, perhaps soldiers themselves, who, it would seem from the Kalashnikovs collected near their feet, have already stripped the dead soldiers of their weapons. These dead are supremely uninterested in the living: in those who took their lives; in witnesses—or in us. Why should they seek our gaze? What would they have to say to us? "We"—this "we" is everyone who has never experienced anything like what they went through—don't understand. We don't get it. We truly can't imagine what it was like. We can't imagine how dreadful, how terrifying war is—and how normal it becomes. Can't understand, can't imagine. That's what every soldier, and every journalist and aid worker and independent observer who has put in time under fire and had the luck to elude the death that struck down others nearby, stubbornly feels. And they are right. ♦



CANDYLAND *In Gerald Scarfe's drawings wear cartoon gas masks and carry machine guns;*



for his redesign of "The Nutcracker," Clara's grandpa leaps over his walker to chase a purple-haired hottie named Ms. V. Aggra; the mice and snowflake ballerinas, dressed like speed skaters, shoot out of a giant fridge. The ballet (Scarfe's first) has its London première this month.

PROFILES

WHIRLWIND

How the filmmaker Mira Nair makes people see the world her way.

BY JOHN LAHR

To get to the director Mira Nair's house in Kampala, Uganda, you follow a single-lane highway north from Entebbe, dogleg right at the roundabout as you enter town, pass a service station where a sign announces "TOILETS NOW HALF OPEN," and proceed south toward the once unfashionable section called Buziga Hill, where real-estate prices have tripled since 1990, when Nair and her husband, the scholar Mahmood Mamdani, bought their two-acre property for about seventy thousand dollars. As Nair barrels along in a secondhand green Toyota RAV4, the road is an embodiment of the extremes in which her films revel—a confusion of enterprise and collapse, of modernity and tradition. On either side, raggedy shops are jammed together like rows of bad teeth. We pass Harrod's Tailors, a shipping container that's now a haberdashery. "People here use everything," Nair says. "There are no fripperies." Boys ride bicycles with fringed back seats; women hurry to work in colorful *gomesi*, weaving past swarms of *boda-bodas*—passenger motorcycles—and reckless *matatus*, the Volkswagen vans that ferry Ugandans around town; red dust rises from dirt roads that meander off into subtropical vegetation. By a rusted sign for the Kiwumulo Country Club ("Cold Beers, Soda, Snacks—Soft Music in Background"), Nair hangs a sharp right. The car jounces up a rutted road that winds a mile and a half, past shanties and the orange-roofed cinder-block vulgarities that have sprung up like gigantic barbed-wire mushrooms, to her house. Nair, who divides her time among Kampala, New York, and New Delhi, found her modest bungalow, which has a magnificent view of Lake Victoria, while scouting locations for her second feature, "Mississippi Masala." "I was looking for something unforgettable," she says. "Like Marilyn Monroe is shorthand for sex, I wanted something you could be nostalgic for. The sun was falling. It was a complete ruin. I fell in love with it instantly."

"Enjoy every part of the frame and make it pulsate with life," Nair tells her students at Columbia University's film school, where she is an adjunct professor. Her own frames are crammed with the contrasting textures of sight, sound, and sociology, and she often invokes André Gide's dictum that tyranny is the absence of complexity. "I have an eye and ear for paradox," she has said. "That is life—the gray area where no one person is less or more virtuous than the other." Nair ("It's Nair like 'fire' ") exudes a cheeky dynamism that, in an earlier age, would have earned her the label of "bright spark." In 2000, she took on the seemingly lunatic task of making a film in thirty days in New Delhi, with a cast of sixty-eight and a budget of $1.2 million. Two years later, "Monsoon Wedding," a joyful and lyrical dissection of a Punjabi family and an upper-middle-class arranged marriage, has become the eighth-highest-grossing foreign film of all time in the United States. (Nair is planning a musical adaptation, which she will direct on Broadway.) The movie took the top prize at last year's Venice International Film Festival, and its popularity accounted for why Nair's Chelsea production company, Mirabai Films, had been approached with three new proposals: a Ted Hughes–Sylvia Plath bio-pic, and film adaptations of Nick Hornby's "Fever Pitch" and Thackeray's "Vanity Fair." It was why Carsey-Werner-Mandabach Productions, which brought the world "Roseanne" and "The Cosby Show," had invited Nair to write a sitcom about an Indian-American family; and why Harvard University, which she attended in the late seventies, was planning to award her the 2003 Harvard Arts Medal.

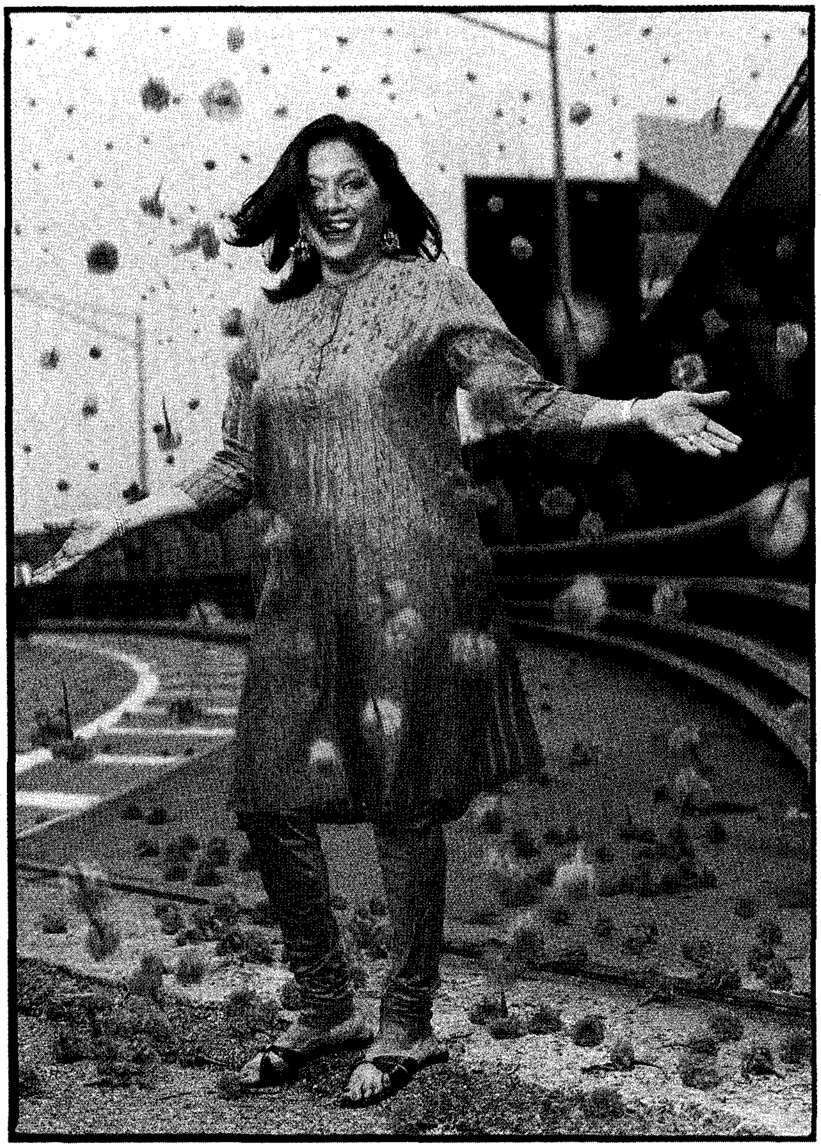
"To be a filmmaker, you have to be diseased," Nair once said. She is, she explains, "permanently afflicted." Among the many accomplishments of "Monsoon Wedding," the most startling is that it conveys onscreen something that is palpable in Nair herself, what the Punjabis call *masti*—an intoxication with life. In film, which she chose as her métier at the age of twenty, Nair has found a form "where I can embrace life completely." She is now forty-five, and her relish for the world around her is fuelled, in part, by the knowledge that three horoscopes have predicted that she'll die at sixty-one. "I don't really believe it, but I don't forget it, either," she says. Nair, who is the youngest of three children reared in an upper-middle-class home in Bhubaneswar, a backwater—"remote even in Indian terms"—some two hundred and forty miles southwest of Calcutta, is a person of color, and she celebrates color. Whether she is showing us Bombay strippers in her documentary "India Cabaret" (1985), the racial divide between blacks and browns in the South in "Mississippi Masala" (1991), or even a white-trash Bayonne, New Jersey, no-hoper, who can't get a date (played, improbably, by Uma Thurman) in the HBO movie "Hysterical Blindness" (2002), Nair's films negotiate disparate ethnic geographies with the same kind of sly civility she practices in life. Her approach is sometimes oblique: she doesn't make political films, but she does make her films politically. Her gift, to which "Monsoon Wedding" attests, is to make diversity irresistible.

Nair is, above all, a populist—a mass communicator who actually maintains contact with the masses. When she was showing her 1996 erotic movie "Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love" in India, where cinemagoing is a vocal, largely male-dominated experience, she insisted that there be special screenings for women. After making "Salaam Bombay!" (1988), her audacious first feature, about street children in India, she started the Salaam Baalak Trust, a program that now assists some four thousand homeless kids a year in India. "I have always been drawn to the stories of people who live on the margins of society—on the edge, or outside, always dealing with the question of what and where is home," she says. Nair herself, who set off for America at eighteen, exists in that weird, liminal expatriate zone, and the complex negotiation of identity across cultural boundaries has become an inevitable theme in her work. "To have a world view—to look at the world through a point outside America—is crucial," she says. Even in India, she notes, "the process of day-to-day living stops people from seeing the things that I see when I come from the outside." One day in 1983, when she was in Bombay, as her taxi idled in traffic, she recalls that a boy "with just a torso and head, on a wooden platform with wheels," grabbed onto her cab. "As we approached the junction, he let go of the cab, pirouetted with the extra velocity, and then made a big gesture, like he'd just finished his most important circus routine. It was just fantastic to have this flamboyant lack of self-pity." She adds, "If I lived there, I might not have noticed the extraordinariness of that." The moment was her inspiration for "Salaam Bombay!"

When Nair was eight, her mischievousness and her fascination with the life stories of the village elders she befriended earned her the nickname Pagli—Hindi for "mad." Once, she even brought the milkman home. Nair grew up a tomboy—"I never had a doll"—with two older, athletic brothers, Vikram and Gautam. She has memories of playing hide-and-seek in the tall grass around the forgotten temples of Bhubaneswar, of collecting red velvet-backed beetles in her father's old cigar box, and of walking barefoot on asphalt roads as steam rose off them after the monsoon rains. But the beauty of the natural world stood in contrast to the sometimes bewildering life within the walls of her family's colonial-style bungalow, with its spacious veranda and terra-cotta-tiled floors.

Her father, Amrit, who is seventy-five and has been separated from her mother, Praveen, for the past twelve years, was then a high-ranking civil servant in charge of several ministries in the state of Orissa. By all accounts, he was a remote figure, who respected status and success and expected the household to revolve around him. "He was a regimented fellow—still is," Nair says. "Not much fun. When he would leave, it would be more relaxed." Amrit didn't have the ease or the grace with people that his beautiful, popular wife had. "Any demonstration of affection is not in me, but I feel that they know I love them," he says of his relationship with his children now. His abiding passion was Persian poetry. He immersed himself in Urdu and wrote poetry himself. He also played recordings of the great Persian singers and translated the lyrics for his children. "That's the time I would love him," Nair says. "He would transport us." But most of the time Amrit preached the gospel of attainment, and he insisted that his children employ their time usefully. During the summer holidays, for instance, he made them memorize and recite passages from Shakespeare and the story of Hannibal crossing the Alps. Nowadays, he's most proud of Mira for her ability to "utilize her time for something worthwhile." "Even I could learn from her, and I was a manager," he admits. But, over the years, his frustrated academic ambitions for Vikram and Gautam, who are now clothing manufacturers, led to acrimonious family battles. "Viki was often humiliated in front of people," Gautam recalls. "Mother was blamed for not having spent more time with him. It was a really messy situation."

"We used to beg them to separate," Nair says of her parents. She remembers "fighting and tension and drama in the house—terrible stuff. My mother would get hysterical, and my father would just relentlessly go at her." When she was eleven, the family moved for two years to Delhi, where they lived in a mansion. Nair has a vivid memory of crouching at the top of a marble staircase with wrought-iron railings while down below, in a vast living room, her parents were


"Monsoon Wedding" conveyed Nair's love of life. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

CORBIS/SABA

quarrelling. They were sitting at opposite ends of an L-shaped couch, by a table that held glasses and a Gilbey's gin bottle filled with water. "My mother took this gin bottle, picked it up, and smashed it over her own head," Nair says. "That's that Indian self-sacrifice."

Much of Nair's startling independence and her social awareness come from her mother's example. "I was very fearless," Praveen says. During Mira's childhood, Praveen did volunteer work, organizing, at one point, a home for the healthy children of lepers. (She is now the chairwoman of the Salaam Baalak Trust.) Because her own trajectory had been determined by marriage, children, and rural life, Praveen, who introduces herself these days as "the producer of the director," encouraged her daughter's intellectual ambitions. She says that she wanted only for Mira "to enjoy what she was doing" and "not settle." "Even though the boys were older, she was the leader," Amrit says. He recalls how Mira, at twelve, pulled a silver-painted wooden switchblade on two boys "who tried to get fresh with her"; how she insisted that a teen-ager who was driving without a license and knocked her into a ditch receive no punishment; and how, at eight, she gave the most senior civil servant in Orissa two rupees, "because you are so old."

If Nair got her confidence from her mother, her desire for harmony and her aversion to authority can be traced, in one way or another, to her confrontations with her father, who, not incidentally, had not wanted her to be born in the first place. "We always regarded me as a contraceptual blunder," Nair says. By 1956, the Indian population explosion had become a serious problem, and Amrit Nair was charged with the task of promoting birth control in the district. The government slogan was "Two or Three, That's Enough." Nair remembers her father saying, "Don't give two *or* three. You give them an inch, they'll take a mile. Make it 'Just Two, That's Enough.' " Praveen's announcement that she was pregnant with a third child was a political embarrassment to him. "He insisted she get rid of me," Nair says. "One time, she thought she'd had the procedure, but it didn't work. He sent her back, apparently. My mother's sister took her to the clinic, but she couldn't do it." To Praveen, who had always wanted a daughter, Mira was a sort of miracle child. Nowadays, when people ask her where Mira got her drive, she answers, "She was determined to be born."

Nair never directly rebelled against her father, but in her early documentaries she attacked the bulwark of his attitudes. "Children of Desired Sex" (1987) challenges the Indian custom of aborting female fetuses; "India Cabaret" examines the hypocrisy of male notions of "virtue." When Nair announced to her family that she was going to spend four months living with the dancers at a cabaret on the outskirts of Bombay, her father sat her down for a talk.

" 'Scum,' he said, 'you are going to live with scum? Why are you doing this?' " Nair wrote in an essay about the film. The exchange continued:

> "I know about all these cabaret girls. They do anything for a quick buck, even sell their flesh." "How do you know about them?" I asked. "Never mind about that. I have experience about the world. A very fine friend of mine offered a whole lot of them to me once. Of course, I didn't take up the offer—but I do know what kind of girls they are. Scum." "But then," I asked, "how do you regard your friend? Is he also scum for offering these girls to you?" My father looked surprised. "Of course not! He is a very sophisticated man of the world. He simply offered what was available."

Nair concluded, "Many of my doubts and fears and anxieties about the idea fell away at that time. I knew that there was a film to make."

Nair grew up remarkably free in a household where her parents' attention and fears, she says, "were for my brothers, not me." Amrit was an intermittent pres-

THE LAST TIME I SAW CHRIS

In Amagansett, for crying out loud, setting the arm of his French helpmeet
toward a funky-as-it-gets exhibit in the Crazy Monkey,
a crosscut saw
in the window not quite making up for this not quite being Long Island Sound,
the gobs of tar
on his and his buddy's pants

suggesting they might have been willing participants
in some recent keelhauling. Blown, too, the opportunity to meet
and greet an incipient Jack-Tar
or wanna-be grease monkey
in an outhouse wired, for the love of mike, for sound.
When he turned away from me I could have sworn I saw

a woman on a seesaw
from the seventies, still flying a flag for the seventies. That's what was with the hot pants.
The politest way of putting it would be to say she and I'd been trying to sound
each other out, though it seemed unlikely ever the twain would meet.
She was just back from Benin. No monkey
business without an overcoat, for crying out loud. No losing the ship for a hap'orth of tar.

Not ship, I was treading water. *Sheep*. A sheep being the avatar
of no god we know of, always the best kind. For she was musing on an ancient saw

having to do with a monkey
and paying p(e)an(u)ts
to the guide, for the love of mike, who'd led her hunting trip. A hartebeest meet
summoned by a hartebeest bugle, a sound

that had barely the strength to resound
through the bush. Boots and saddles. The clench of Wright's Coal Tar
as she suddenly deemed it meet
to turn the other cheek, for crying out loud, looking back at me as if she saw that I foresaw
the needle tracks just above the line of her pants
when her arms would set from years of firing up, as if I foresaw the monkey

on her back ("*les ans, mon ange, les ans manqués*"),
as if I might look forward from an era in which we were all still relatively sound
in wind and limb to an era of night sweats, gasps and pants,
for the love of mike, now threatening to tar
all of us, straight or gay, with the same brush, the god who oversaw
our not knowing of him yearning now to mete

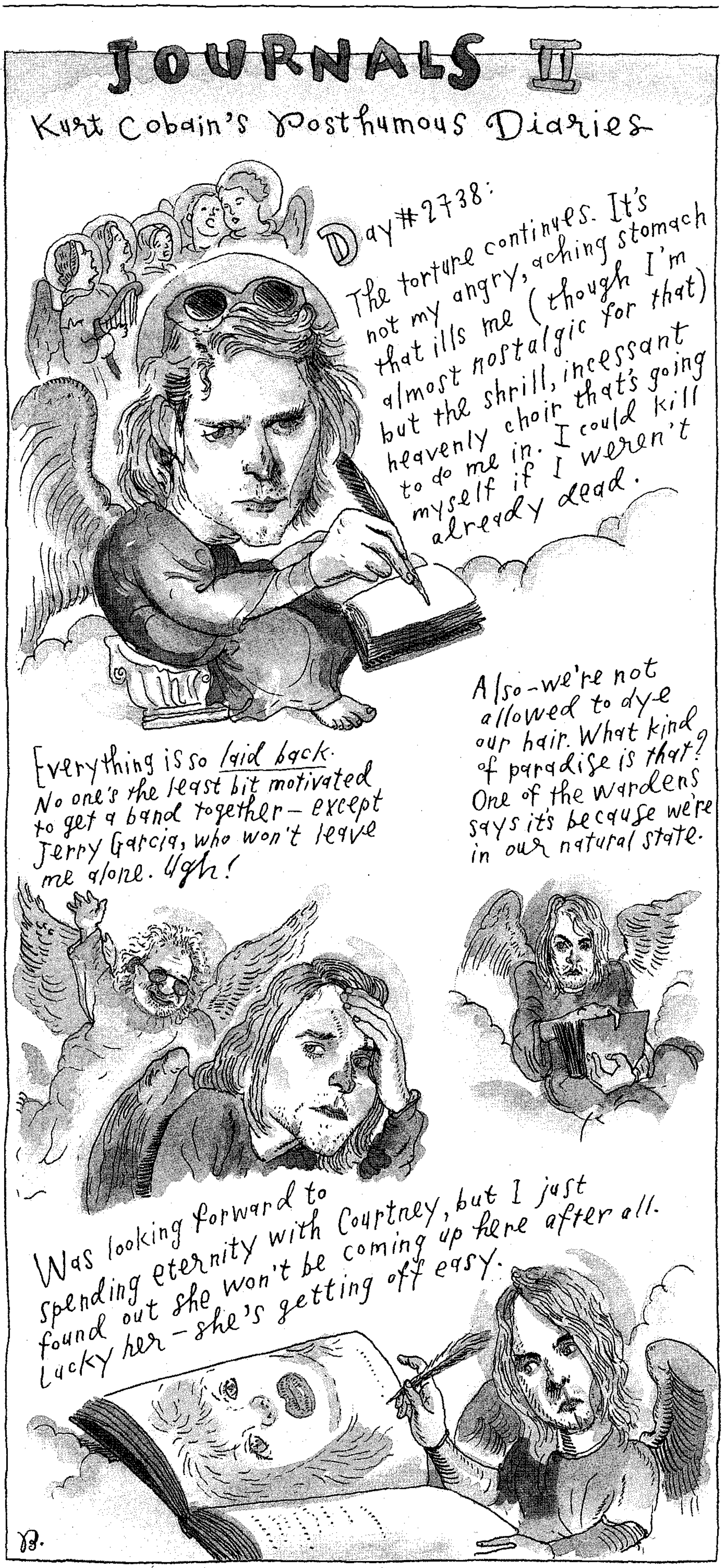
out retribution as the hartebeest pants for cooling streams, *taratantara taratantara,*
our breathing indistinguishable now from the sound of a saw
through the breast of a monkey, for crying out loud, through monkey, or other bush meat.

—*Paul Muldoon*

ence; Praveen had enough confidence in her daughter's abilities not to worry too much about her. "That allowed me to have whatever interests I wanted, because nobody really cared," Nair says. "I was not listened to, ever. The one great thing about that is that you end up actually listening more." Left to fend for herself, Nair became her own project. In her teens, she taught herself to type and play the sitar; she tried painting, wrote poetry, got into amateur theatricals, and, inevitably, became an outstanding student. "She would sort of jump for joy when examinations were coming," Praveen remembers. Even in the case of her education, Nair manufactured her own destiny. After returning to Bhubaneswar from Delhi, where she had been at the top of her class, Nair was reënrolled at the mediocre local school, while her brothers were sent to distinguished boarding schools. When she complained, her father said, "Tell me everything that's wrong with your school, and I'll fix it." Instead of arguing, Nair set about orchestrating her escape. She started rigging her school essays—for which she consistently got A's—writing coherent first and last paragraphs but inserting gibberish in between, to prove that her teachers weren't even reading them. At the same time, she enlisted the help of her former headmistress in gaining midterm admission to an exclusive convent school called Tara Hall. Nair then presented her father with the problem and the solution. He capitulated. A few years later, bored during her first year at Delhi University, Nair applied for scholarships to a number of prestigious universities. She decided against Cambridge ("I had a chip on my shoulder about the Brits"); Yale lost her application; Wellesley wouldn't cover full tuition. So, in 1976, she went to Harvard, "by default." "I had seen it in 'Love Story,'" Nair says. "The only thing my father said—which made me throw up at the time—was 'Oh, yes, the Kennedys went there.'"

At Harvard, Nair quickly made an impression. "She was strikingly beautiful," says Sooni Taraporevala, a classmate who became her friend and later her screenwriting partner. "She wore this tweed cape. She was like a gale-force wind." In her first semester, Nair performed Jocasta's speech from Ted Hughes's translation of Seneca's "Oedipus" and won the Boylston Prize. She was coached in her performance by the classicist Robert Fitzgerald, who told her, she recalls, "You know, Mira, you have too many climaxes. You should really work toward one climax." "I sort of sweetly challenged him," she says. "I said, 'I think that could be a male view.'" The mobility and liberality of America emboldened Nair to pursue acting. "I was intuitively comfortable onstage," she says. "I also had a huge love of the written word. And theatre was the word in many ways." She had already done political street theatre in Calcutta, with the Bengali playwright Badal Sircar; at Delhi University she had starred in boulevard drama ("Equus," "Habeas Corpus") and in Shakespeare (she played Cleopatra); and at Harvard she was Arkadina in "The Seagull" and Eva Perón in a Latino version of "Antigone." The summer after her first year there, Nair headed to New York to explore the theatrical avant-garde. She hung out at La Mama, in the East Village, worked with the director Joe Chaikin, and met Judith Malina and Julian Beck, the founders of the Living Theatre. But the pretensions of the theatre world and her lack of control over her life as an actress dampened Nair's enthusiasm for the stage. When she returned to Harvard, she submitted some landscape photographs to the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies, where the professors found them impressive enough to admit her as one of an annual quota of ten students. But it wasn't long before she dropped photography for film. The form, as well as allowing her to deploy her extraordinary social skills, assuaged her chronic restlessness; it was a medium that answered her need both to embrace life and to be listened to.

Nair hadn't taken to still photography but she had taken to her teacher Mitch Epstein, a wiry, taciturn, meticulous twenty-five-year-old, who taught the introductory-photography course she


JOURNALS II
Kurt Cobain's Posthumous Diaries
Day #2738: The torture continues. It's not my angry, aching stomach that ills me (though I'm almost nostalgic for that) but the shrill, incessant heavenly choir that's going to do me in. I could kill myself if I weren't already dead.
Everything is so laid back. No one's the least bit motivated to get a band together – except Jerry Garcia, who won't leave me alone. Ugh!
Also – we're not allowed to dye our hair. What kind of paradise is that? One of the wardens says it's because we're in our natural state.
Was looking forward to spending eternity with Courtney, but I just found out she won't be coming up here after all. Lucky her – she's getting off easy.
B.

BARRY BLITT

took in the summer of 1977. "She wasn't great in the class," Epstein remembers, but he nonetheless found her "magical, full in body and in spirit." Epstein, who had been taught by the photographer Garry Winogrand, set Nair an example of uncompromising artistic commitment to "the way in which image holds a kind of symbolic possibility." "He taught me the importance of the frame, how sacred it is," Nair says. "How, in framing the environment, you would artfully talk to the audience about how to see that picture, how to see the world."

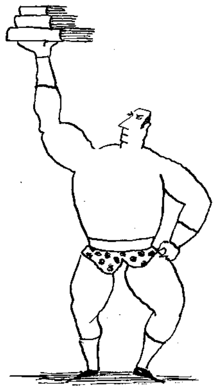
Nair worked as Epstein's assistant on freelance assignments, helping to create "atmosphere" for his shots and to edit his contact sheets. "We were three-hundred-dollars-a-month sort of people," she says. They were together for twelve years, eight of them as husband and wife, and their relationship was, according to Epstein, a symbiotic one. In 1978, on a trip to India to meet Nair's somewhat scandalized family, Epstein worried about how to connect with the people there so that he could photograph them. He asked Nair for a few Hindi words to disarm the locals. "She said that whenever you meet anybody you should say '*Mujhe su-su karna hai*,'" Nair's brother Vikram recalls. "Which means 'I want to take a leak.'" Although Epstein was a Jewish boy from Holyoke, Massachusetts, the couple was married in India, in 1981, in the flamboyant Punjabi fashion that Nair re-created in "Monsoon Wedding": Epstein, wearing a turban, made his entrance on a white horse and sat by a bonfire with his bride as he said his *om shantis*. "For a long period of time, it was a blessed life," Epstein says. "She was a catalyst that made me shift. Her curiosity was infectious. She held out a hand that I attached myself to."

In the course of a seven-year career in cinéma-vérité documentary—a genre that was almost unknown in India at the time—Nair learned the art of narrative and of creating a kind of drama through editing. "It's all about intuitive rhythm," she says. The lessons were hard won. In the eighteen-minute film that Nair submitted as her thesis at Harvard, "Jama Masjid Street Journal"—named for a Muslim community near the great mosque in old Delhi—she walked the streets with her Bolex, using the camera as a kind of veil. "The film was about how people reacted to me on the street, as a woman who spoke the language, who was from there and yet not from there," she has said. It was meant to be silent, but at the urging of friends Nair added narration, a concession she later regretted, although it taught her what she considers her first lesson in cinema: "Never surrender your own idea of the film . . . for the momentary pleasure of pleasing those around you." While Nair says she is embarrassed by the film now, D. A. Pennebaker, the panjandrum of cinéma vérité, was charmed by its adventurousness and theatricality. Nair met Pennebaker in New York after she graduated (she claims to have "stalked" him). "I saw her as potentially a natural filmmaker," he says. "I could just feel the want." Pennebaker helped Nair get a grant to make her next film, "So Far from India."

The nonprofit-documentary life was not, according to Nair, exactly "comfy." "It was a mountain of rejection," she says—a constant battle to find money, followed by a constant battle to find an audience. "I was getting killed on both sides." Every year from 1980 to 1984, Nair spent weeks on a Greyhound bus, taking her work to unions, women's hostels, and colleges. "I would make, like, three hundred dollars a pop, live in the dorms with the students, or in some assistant professor's house," she says. The questions from the audience weren't particularly encouraging. "It was depressing to be in bloody Minneapolis and have an old lady say, 'I noticed a tap in your documentary. Do you have running water in India?' " Nair says. "You'd think, Fuck, who am I doing this for? I'm not here to educate you about India." And, as she found out with "India Cabaret," which was bought by PBS, then rejected by Channel 13, PBS's New York affiliate, the Indian community could be just as misguided. " 'What is this image of India you are presenting? When will you show us doctors and the Porsches I have in my garage?' " Nair says, imitating a Bollywood accent. "I said, 'When a doctor in a Porsche becomes an interesting character, I'll be there.' " Television, she says, "felt like a void. I didn't know whom I was reaching." She began to hanker for a wider audience and for more control over the gesture, the light, the story—"to be able to pick out the color of the actor's underwear." In other words, instead of waiting for the truth in hit-and-run documentary fashion, Nair wanted to organize it in a fictional way.

In 1985, "India Cabaret" opened the first Indian International Film Festival, in Hyderabad, where, as Nair wrote to Epstein, who had served as the documentary's cinematographer, it was "a pretty major sensation." In Nair's assessment, "People were really responding to the language, how people really talk in Bombay." Sooni Taraporevala attended the screening on her way to Orissa, where she and Nair had planned to do research for a film about Nair's childhood. "The audience was totally into it—you know, laughing and clapping," she says. "It wasn't just the language, to my mind. It was the sense of something's being relevant." Buoyed by the reaction to the film, Taraporevala reminded Nair of a subject they'd discussed before. "Why not develop your earlier idea on the Bombay kids instead?" she asked. Nair's response, as she wrote in her journals, was "It's too huge, too ambitious. . . . Sooni retorted in her fearless, nonchalant style: 'NO GUTS NO GLORY.' " Nair and Taraporevala changed their tickets and set off for Bombay.

The challenge was herculean. Nair had never been on a movie set, never made a feature film, never developed a budget, and had no access to real funding, though, by even a modest estimate, she would need almost a million dollars. "The cost of my film is the cost of a leg of one camel in . . . 'Ishtar,' " Nair told studio executives. Nonetheless, in June of 1987, Nair began the project without the money to finish it. She felt, she says, "like a warrior." The slogan on the production T-shirts bore witness to her bravado: "NO GUTS NO GLORY—52 LOCATIONS 52 DAYS—WHAT PROBLEM? NO PROBLEM."



The enterprise brought together the intellectual strands of Nair's life: theatre, politics, the documentary tradition. Acting workshops were organized for the street children Nair recruited—a hundred and thirty narrowed down to twenty-four, who were then issued official-looking I.D. cards to protect them from being carted off by the police and remanded to the almost Dickensian homes dramatized in the film. In a series of drafts, Nair and Taraporevala developed a plot from the stories of street children they had interviewed. The film, they decided, would follow an abandoned ten-year-old as he made his way through the choked Bombay slums, where he lived rough among beggars and drug addicts, progressing from bumpkin to street-savvy survivor. "Salaam Bombay!" would capture the pathos and bravery amid India's chaos, the realities of its low life and its low talk.

But the uncertainty of so many factors, according to Epstein, who was the co-producer and production designer, made the situation "hellish." "It was a David-and-Goliath situation," he says. "We were up against all the odds—how to get through it, how not to get sick, how to keep everybody together. It was larger than us." Dinaz Stafford, Nair's collaborator and trouble-shooter, remembers one moment of despair: "We'd been working on the film. We'd set up the workshop. This huge juggernaut had been moved into action, getting people to work for hardly any money. And Mira and I went up on the top of this building—it was sunset—and she told me she didn't have the money for the project. It was like, O.K., we may have to close this now." After a lot of flimflammery and economy with the truth, Nair managed to cajole completion cash out of a French company. At the end of the shoot, she wrote in her journal, "I am so worn out, worn out of feeling, insisting, demanding, hoping, making it happen. A section of my hair has turned almost completely gray, à la Indira." She was thirty years old.

Six months later, on May 19, 1988, only three days after she'd finished cutting the movie, "Salaam Bombay!" made its world première at the closing gala at Cannes. After the screening, a crowd of two thousand stood and applauded for more than fifteen minutes. "Salaam Bombay!" was the first Indian film to win the Caméra d'Or at Cannes; it also earned an Oscar nomination.

Nair's life changed again on March 29, 1989, when she and Taraporevala were in Nairobi researching "Mississippi Masala," this time with studio backing. The movie aimed to tell the story of some Indian-Africans, exiled from Uganda by

"It keeps me from obsessing about my body."

Idi Amin, making a new life in the United States. It was Nair and Taraporevala's first visit to Africa. For her research, Nair had read Mahmood Mamdani's book "From Citizen to Refugee," which dealt with the Ugandan expatriation, and she had arranged to interview him in Kampala, where he lived. But Mamdani turned up early, in Nairobi, and called from the lobby of Nair's hotel to ask if she was free. "We thought he would be a fudsy-dudsy professor," Nair says. She told Taraporevala, "He's some sort of a lefty. Let's just hide the materialism." They were shoving the bags and sarongs they'd purchased earlier that day under their beds when the bell rang. Nair opened the door to Mamdani, a handsome Ugandan-Asian in his early forties, with playful eyes and a gentle authority. He looked over Nair's shoulder. "I'm looking for Mira Nair," he said. "I'd expected a middle-aged, sort of sagelike person," Mamdani explains. "I had no idea who Mira was. I lived in a city that didn't have a functioning movie theatre."

They met up again a few days later in Kampala. In that ghostly setting—the war had just ended, and the city was devastated—their relationship began. The trajectories of their lives had an eerie similarity: both came from small towns and now moved in multiple worlds; both had won scholarships to Harvard; and both blended the personal and the political in their work. By the time Nair left, she had become, she says, "humbled by love." In typically headstrong fashion, she returned to New York and, as she put it, "willed myself" out of a marriage that, on the surface, "had nothing wrong with it." "I thought, I can't control it. I can't stop," Nair says. "Mitch said I took a piece of his heart. It was true. And it was terrible. I turned my back on the home we had made. I felt like a foreigner again, totally outside." Epstein stayed on as the co-producer and production designer of "Mississippi Masala," but, he says, "the way we worked together had little of the grace and the quality of communication we had achieved over the years." Nair soon moved to Kampala's Makerere University, where Mamdani was teaching political science, and where, in campus housing, they had running water for only an hour a day. "I went from Jacuzzi to jerrican," Nair says. "Love is like that."

Last May, in a screening room at Columbia, Nair watched a short film by a Turkish student and offered her critique. "Remember, I told you about my hesitancy with your doing something seemingly generic," she told the woman, who had produced a vignette about an American girl and her narcissistic mother. "The mother and daughter have got nothing to do with where you came from. It's showing to me in the film. In that sense, I have to say I am disappointed. The thing is you don't know these women. You don't actually love them or know them." She concluded, "See you in Istanbul." In a way, Nair was teaching the bitter lesson she herself had learned in the nineties.

"Mira's passed through a period of a certain amount of humbling," Epstein says. "I wouldn't say she got a little bigheaded. I'd say she got very bigheaded." Certainly, for a time, something seemed to come between her and what she put on the screen. "The Perez Family" (1995), which was Nair's first experience of Hollywood, and the first story she hadn't developed herself, has none of her defining authenticity. All her obsessions are present—exile, family, home—but they are in the dialogue, not the subtext. The film is almost unwatchable as it tries to factor out its histrionic dramatic equations: a released Cuban political prisoner, mistaken by immigration officials for the husband of a high-spirited prostitute, tries in vain to reconnect with his real wife, while the prostitute works to build a family from whatever misfits cross her path. "There was too much plot, and that was part of the problem," Michael Nozik, one of the film's producers, says. "It was too overt. It was too obvious." As one critic wrote, "It looks like a musical after all the songs have been cut out." Although Nair claims that the film had a more magic-realist quality before the studio recut it for comedy, "The Perez Family" strains for life instead of exuding it. It feels as if Nair had never fully taken hold of her material, which in a way is true. "They really ran roughshod over us," the producer Lydia Dean Pilcher says. "We don't like to say that they took the movie away. She had a choice to walk away or to stick by it. . . . The whole experience made what she did next incredibly important. It had to be a comeback."

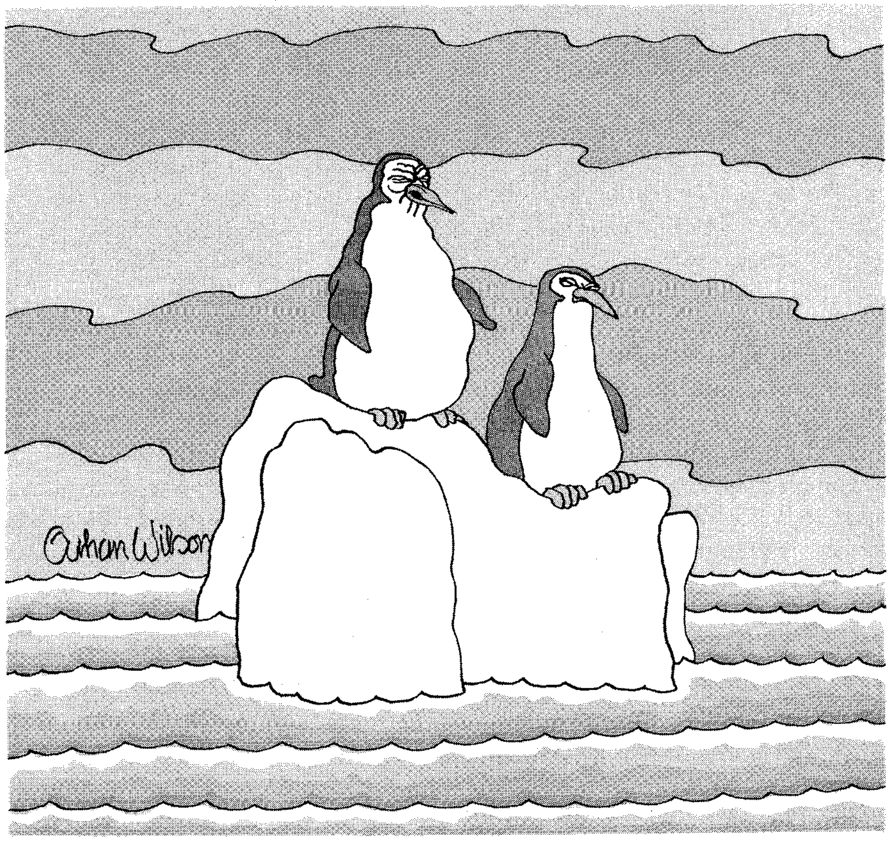
It wasn't. "Kama Sutra," which Nair now calls "an aberration," was a sumptuous, peacock-colored spectacle, sensual in its use of costumes and tableaux, but uncertain in its narrative. The movie recreates sixteenth-century India through the story of two virgins, who are competitive friends in childhood and sexual rivals in adulthood—one marries a king and the other seduces him, only to fall in love with a sculptor. (“Because I love you, my work has a power that even I cannot explain,” he says.) But the period detail gets in the way of the characterization, which more or less peters out. “It sort of bombed,” Mamdani says of the film. “It was a moment of learning for her, painful as it was. It is the issue that she wrestles with: narrative versus design.”

The year that “Kama Sutra” was released, Nair moved to South Africa with Mamdani, who had been appointed the head of the African-studies program at the University of Cape Town. The next three years were hard ones. “She had very little to do,” Mamdani says. “Her film career was going through a difficult time. She stagnated.” The South Africans, he adds, “simply weren’t interested in her. She was not invited to talk at the universities where film and cinema were being taught. She had a bout with a sort of racism.” Her Indian clothes indicated to the South African community, Mamdani says, “that she was pre-modern, pre-rational, must be spoken to slowly in special English, with clear diction.” Nair cared for their son, Zohran, who was born in 1991. She and Taraporevala worked on scripts and adapted Abraham Verghese’s book “My Own Country: A Doctor’s Story” for Showtime; and Nair spent six weeks helping children from the nearby townships make films of their lives. But, Nair’s brother Gautam says, “She was very worried that she’d lost her touch, that in her life as a suburban housewife the edge had gone from her. She perhaps wouldn’t see things and wouldn’t be able to express things through her films as she could before.”

When the photographer Adam Bartos suggested that they collaborate on “The Laughing Club of India”—a remarkable documentary account of a Bombay doctor who set up laughing clubs to improve people’s well-being—Nair agreed. “She was very self-deprecating about her career at that point,” Bartos says. “I thought it would be therapeutic.” After the film was finished, Nair began to dream up her next project. “I had done the epic,” she says. “I had done the millions of dollars. I had done the special effects. I had done the erotic. I wanted to get back to basics, to prove to myself that I needed the essence of drama and had something to say.” The result was “Monsoon Wedding.” “At least people won’t meet me and say, ‘Hi, Mira, love your early work,’ ” she says.

On a clear day in mid-May, as Orthodox Jews in long black *reklakh* and Muslims in flowing djellabahs scuttled past with their groceries and their kids in tow, Nair found herself in the Kensington section of Brooklyn, at the corner of Avenue C and McDonald. She was sitting in her *churidar-kurta*—the earth-colored Indian cotton pants and tunic she favors—on the stoop of one of the unprepossessing bungalows whose aluminum awnings give the neighborhood the sleepy feel of a Jersey Shore town. She was there to shoot her contribution to a French project that would include the responses of eleven directors to the events of September 11th. The movie’s collective title, “11'09"01”—or eleven minutes, nine seconds, and a frame—was the challenge that its producers had extended to Nair, as well as to such far-flung independent filmmakers as Ken Loach, Claude Lelouch, Danis Tanovic, Youssef Chahine, Samira Makhmalbaf, and Sean Penn.

Nair had chosen a true story as her narrative: that of Mohammad Salman Hamdani, a twenty-three-year-old research assistant from Bayside, Queens, who took the subway to work that Tuesday and never returned. For a time, his parents thought that Salman was among the thousand or so Muslims detained for security reasons after the attack. Then, to the family’s humiliation, the *Post* splashed his picture on its pages, along with insinuations of collaboration and treason. The Hamdanis protested to their congressman, and even to President Bush. Six months later, Salman’s remains were found at the World Trade Center, where, it turned out, he had rushed to save lives, and he was given a hero’s burial. The story would allow Nair, she said, to bear witness to the pervasiveness of what she calls “Islamophobia.” “After September 11th, none of the media spoke of *why* this had happened,” she says. “What *was* talked about was that Muslims equal terrorists.” (“11'09"01” has been distributed successfully in twenty countries but not in the United States, where a few of its segments are perceived, in some quarters, as anti-American. Loach’s film, for instance, reminded audiences that on September 11,



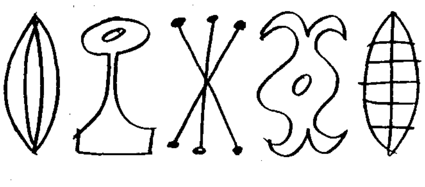
“Call this an iceberg? When I was a kid, we wouldn’t have called this an iceberg!”

1973, America helped bring about the downfall of Chile's democratically elected Socialist leader, Salvador Allende, and installed General Augusto Pinochet.)

On the set, Nair cast a droll eye over her skeleton crew and noted that there was no director's chair, no trailer, no catering tent, in fact, "no nothing." "It's back to the low-budget slut thing," she joked. She walked me to the end of the block, to a spot where she'd filmed the day before. Eight months after the eleventh, American flags still hung from almost every house on the street, which had a mosque, Baitul Jannah Masjid, at one end; even the brick subway bridge across from the mosque had been spray-painted with stars and stripes. "What I love about shooting in India is to choreograph the chaos," Nair said. "Here it's all so dreadfully competent and systematized—you have to create the electricity." Still, the previous day, in the twilight, amid the rumble of the subway and the whine of cop cars, with kids on skateboards maneuvering around a sign that read, in English and Arabic, "Road Closed for Prayer," she had wrangled thirty-five wary local Bangladeshi Muslim men onto a traffic island and filmed them praying. "The great thing about yesterday was that we captured India in Brooklyn," Nair said. "They were praying in the direction of Mecca, but in front of them was graffiti. What I want is a tapestry of the banality of the Muslim presence in New York. It's just absolutely normal."

The focus of Nair's film was Salman Hamdani's parents: Talat, a middle-school English teacher, and Saleem, a convenience-store owner, who had been living in America for more than two decades before the September 11th attack. In a kitchen laid out to resemble the Hamdanis', Nair sat on an apple crate, hunched behind a video monitor. On the screen was the rectangle—about five by three inches—where Nair does a significant part of her work: composing the image. This morning, she was watching the actress Tanvi Azmi playing Talat, making a curry at the stove as she daydreamed about her lost son. From her cramped command post, Nair called for small angle adjustments from her director of photography, Declan Quinn, and checked a line of dialogue with her script supervisor. Then she pushed back the apple crate and walked into the shot to talk to Azmi. Nair never directs her actors from behind the video monitor; she needs to see them in real space and time and communicate face to face. As she huddled with Azmi, suggesting that she try humming as she cooked, the actress stood motionless, blinking, like someone caught in the headlights—which, in a way, is what Nair's dark, kohl-lined eyes are. Her scrutiny is at once penetrating and containing; it can feel like an embrace. "Her eyes are as strong as a camera," says the actress Sarita Choudhury, who starred in "Mississippi Masala" and "Kama Sutra." "It's almost like 'Oh, my God, this is my moment.' I know it's never a casual thing. Something's being registered. I get very excited."

Nair works with a handheld Aaton Super16. "A handheld camera means you have to be alive to the moment," she says. "It also means you have to have a lot of stamina." To build that stamina, Nair and many of her crew, including the resourceful women she keeps around her on location, whom she teasingly calls her International Bhenji Brigade ("not-so-hip sisters," in her translation), take a ninety-minute yoga class before each day's shoot. "Mira allows you to jump into her story, and you fall into her world," says Dinaz Stafford, who was about to start a second postgraduate degree, at Cambridge, when Nair enlisted her, in the late eighties, to help organize the Bombay street kids. I felt the centrifugal force myself when Nair persuaded me to join her early-morning yoga ritual. "I really think it promotes a kind of egolessness in the work," she said. When Nair and six of her Bhenjis arrived at the appointed place—a tenth-floor office in the West Village—they found it locked. Nair considered the problem for a moment, then threw down her lavender yoga mat in the neon-lit corridor opposite the elevators, stripped to her shorts, and, much to the amusement of some Russian workmen who ogled from a nearby office, began a series of headstands, handstands, and downward-facing-dog and warrior postures. Yoga's discipline of physical flexibility is, for Nair, also a lesson in intellectual flexibility. "The way the body is asked to be in those positions really teaches you the art of resistance and surrender," she said. "You stretch and then you pull. If the solutions aren't coming from one place, you have to look at another."



That morning, for instance, rain interfered with the movie's planned opening shot, which was to have been filmed in Flushing, Queens, in an area where planes swoop in close to the buildings before veering off to land at Kennedy Airport. The camera was to pan with a plane, then find Tanvi Azmi in a sea of non-white faces. Nair now had to conjure up a new opening, in the turquoise-tiled vastness of the Fatih Camii Mosque, in Brooklyn. As she improvised the logistics of the shot, kneeling barefoot by the screen that separates praying women from praying men, she looked up at her director of photography. "I want you to focus on her hands, not just her face," she said. "As soon as the hands hit her face, they should be in focus." Once the shot was established, Nair's attention went to a bank of lights on the side wall, which suddenly switched on, turning the gray day sunny. "Totally looking good. Totally looking good. God's here," she said.

At work, Nair is swift, clear, and good-humored. Even at the end of the day, after five failed attempts to coördinate her driver and the passengers in her car, Nair, with hands on hips, joked, "There is a limit to democracy!" "She has a kind of charmed humor," Epstein says, "a way of making somebody feel good." Sometimes she does it just by sidling up to a crew member and jostling him with her shoulder. Sometimes she does it with nicknames. Nair's talkative doe-eyed son, Zohran, who exudes the charm of the well-loved, is known by dozens of coinages, including Z, Zoru, Fadoose, and Nonstop Mamdani. Even her unsatisfactory assistant director—"He doesn't pay attention to what is involved in each shot," she complains—has an alternate name; she calls him Phuttone. In a kind of ersatz Hindi, "it means 'a broken drum,'" she says. "He has no idea." Most of the time, however, her naming is a strategy for intimacy, which allows her to play with people and to let others play with her. During the filming of "Salaam Bombay!," the child actors referred to her variously as Tough Sister, Danger Director, Atom Bomb, and Whirlwind.

Nair turned the final day of shooting at the mosque into a sort of extended family outing. In addition to orchestrating the cast, crew, and a platoon of extras, she was happily entertaining Zohran, Lydia

Dean Pilcher and her seven-year-old son, and Taraporevala, who was visiting from Bombay with her two young children. Far from distracting Nair, the swarming confusion of realms seems to intensify her concentration. "Her orientation to relationships is very familial," Mamdani says. "She treasures loyalty, and therefore doesn't really work in terms of a purely one-to-one basis. She creates groups." Like the set for "Monsoon Wedding," which was almost a home movie filled with the props and the people of her Delhi circle, the "11'09"01" set was for Nair a sort of emotional safety net, a simulacrum of family love. As Sarita Choudhury says, "She really wants to live in a village and go to the well with her friends."

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By the time I visited Nair in Kampala, she was already beginning work on her next project. She had turned down "Fever Pitch" and the Plath-Hughes project but accepted "Vanity Fair"; and she had enlisted Reese Witherspoon to play Becky Sharp. Although Witherspoon usually plays "the cute pesky sort," Nair said, she sees her as a potentially "sensual and full-blown woman." "It's not there yet, but we're going to put it there," she added. Nair was also occupied with a fragrance garden that she was planting next to her house to attract butterflies and birds. A playing field had been levelled for Zohran, and she walked me down a steep embankment to a jacaranda tree, near which she planned to build an editing studio. The deliriums of the First World, with its "casualness of acquisition," as Nair calls it, felt very far away. What was renewing about Africa, she said, "is a real connection with the earth—one that I had in my childhood, but not since then." Inside Nair's house, the emphasis is on the homespun and the elemental: "It makes my imagination soar a bit," she says. In the garden, what excites her is the drama of color and shape. As she patrolled the flower beds, sizing up and reblocking the plants like so many actors in a scene, she pointed to a purple blossom that the gardener had tried to slip into her selection. "Peter?" she said, putting her hand on his shoulder. "Did you choose the chrysanthemums? I don't like them—a namby-pamby flower!" Her head swivelled toward the house. "Look!" she said. "The butterflies are already coming!"

Out shopping the previous day, Nair had seen a sign she wanted to buy: "LIFE IS SWEET BUT SHORT." The phrase spoke to her professional drive, but also to her sense of gratitude. "It's a privilege" were her words to me as we stepped for the first time into the spectacular luxuriance of her leafy hill. "Mira likes happiness around her," Taraporevala had told me, and the making of happiness, it seemed to me, was both Nair's ambition and her profession. It was also what had drawn her to "Vanity Fair" and to what she called the "yogic question" raised in the last sentences of the novel: "Which of us is happy in this world? Which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?"

Sitting on her veranda, paging through Thackeray, Nair recalled the former studio executive Scott Greenstein, who had first approached her with the "Vanity Fair" project, not long after "Monsoon Wedding" had come out. "It was kind of condescending," she says. "He said, 'You know, Mira, you gotta do a big English-language picture.' I said, 'Hello, Scott? "Monsoon Wedding" is sixty per cent English.'" She went on, "I was just teasing him—teasing doesn't exist there. So I bait them: 'So now that I can do brown people I can do white people, too! Thank you, Scott.'" She riffled through the pages of the novel, then pushed herself forward from the orange cushions of her wicker sofa to read me an underlined sentence: "So these two were each exemplifying the Vanity of this life, and each longing for what he or she could not get." She peered over her sunglasses. "If I can get that, it'll be so amazing," she said. Thackeray's comic philosophical detachment, in a way, is not unlike the detachment that Nair has engineered for herself by shifting cultures. "What is meaningful in one place is absolutely meaningless in another," she said. "You can't take yourself too seriously. It's a very good way of keeping the absurdity of fame in context. People who are venerated and think they're the answer are not students anymore. You have to be a student at all times."

As we talked, I noticed, beyond the patio's pink hibiscus and crimson bougainvillea, a brindled goat grazing in the field. I asked its name.

"Toofani," Nair said. "We gave it my old name—Whirlwind."

"A remnant of your old self?" I asked.

"I hope not too old," she said. "You must always have a little *toofani* in you." ♦

FICTION

SIN: EARLY IMPRESSIONS

BY JOHN UPDIKE

If Owen's childhood happiness had to be distilled into one moment, it would be the day of a snowstorm, in the vicinity of Christmas—midafternoon, the outdoors already darkening under the snow clouds, tinsel and needles falling off the holiday evergreen in the front parlor onto the miniature landscape below, which he and his mother had concocted of cotton and sponge trees and fragile papier-mâché houses gathered around the speckled mirror of a pond, his little blue Lionel train with its transparent smell of lubricating oil assembled on its oval track—when the clacking letter slot announced that Mr. Bingham had trudged through the blizzard and, for the second time that day, delivered the mail. That mailmen walked and trolley cars clanged through the snow seemed to confirm the Hollywood, comic-strip version of American reality; we were as safe, and as lovingly regarded from above, as the tiny, unaging figures in a shaken snow globe. Little Owen believed everything he was told, and believed in everything his environment's elders urged upon him. He took comfort, perhaps abnormally much, from the town's presiding public presences—the schoolteachers, and the highway crew, who from their tarry truck threw down cinders in winter and smoking gravel in the summer, and the three town cops, one short, one fat, and one with a rumored drinking problem, not to mention the little old lady, her glasses on a cord around her neck, who accepted the monthly electric bill at her barred window in Borough Hall, and the mailman, stocky, stalwart Mr. Bingham, who with the heroism of the well-publicized postal-service slogan plodded his way up and down Mifflin Street twice a day, leaning decidedly away from his leather pouch, in which Mickey Mouse comic books and secret coding rings and signed photographs of movie stars would sometimes come to Owen.

Just slightly above the administrators of local order were the national celebrities. They were, indeed, more accessible and familiar: Jack Benny and Fibber McGee cracking their jokes and suffering their embarrassments on the little Philco right in the piano room, next to the greasy-armed easy chair where Owen ate peanut-butter crackers in a double rapture of laughter and mastication; Tyrone Power, his black eyebrows knitted in a troubled frown, and Joan Crawford, her silky wide lips bravely tremulous and her great eyes each harboring a tear that would fill a bucket, on the screen at the sloping little movie house, the Scheherazade, on the avenue with the trolley tracks; and the tweedy, pipe-sucking writers and bespectacled lab-coated inventors and slick-haired giddy café-society people present in the shiny magazines, *Life* and *Liberty* and *Collier's* and the *Saturday Evening Post*, on the upright wooden rack at Eberly's Drug Store, buyable by any local person with a dime. There was a friendliness, a closeness, in the way this firmament curved above the town of Willow; the voices of Bing Crosby and Lowell Thomas and Kate Smith, purely melodious and informative, carried none of the abrasive demands of real voices, and yet these celebrities, to judge from the sketches on the radio comedies, behaved much like Owen's family, having quarrels that faded away and visiting the bank and the dentist. Jack Benny even went next door in Hollywood to borrow a cup of sugar from Ronald Colman. At their continental distance these stars partook of the life lived in Owen's neighborhood, with its spindly porches and buckling retaining walls. There was no better way to live—no grander, more virtuous country than America, and no homier state than Pennsylvania.

Willow had been a "string town," a straggle of houses grown from a wayside inn along the road, a road that, followed along a southeasterly river for forty-five miles, eventually reached Philadelphia but was here called Mifflin Street, after the quarrelsome first governor of the Keystone State. Three miles in the other direction lay a medium-sized city, Alton, with its factories of blackened brick set right in amid the row houses, its railroad tracks cutting the downtown in two, its red-light district called Cherry Alley, its corner bars fronted in PermaStone, its movie palaces of pseudo-Islamic grandeur, and its noisy, porky restaurants—"rip-off joints," Owen's father called them. He hated eating out; he hated being waited on, especially by men, who he felt were more expensive and bullying than waitresses; he hated rich restaurant food, which sometimes made him sick; he hated dessert, the sales tax, and the tip. Owen's mother, overweight in all but his earliest memories of her, loved eating well, and would sit there cowed and fuming while her husband methodically ruined her pleasure. Or so it seemed to her small son, their only child, who read the marital drama from a limited point of view, sympathizing with his mother. Yet his father's fear of running out of money sank into his own stomach, and gnawed there; it was not exactly sin but an excuse for sin, rubbing right next to it. He could see how people could steal, if they were poor enough.

The sandstone inns, seeds of villages some of which thrived and expanded while others remained a decaying huddle, were spaced every three miles or so, the distance a man could walk in an hour, or a team of horses could pull a farm wagon on a summer day without needing to be watered. Farm life still controlled time. Old people dozed in the middle of the day. Neighbors on the street peddled asparagus, beans, and tomatoes grown in their back yards to one another, and Mifflin Street, with its high crown that made rainwater rush in the gutters, resounded in the morning to

ELLIOTT ERWITT/MAGNUM

the languid hoofbeats of horses drawing wagons to the farmers' market a half mile away, on the far side of the Alton Pike, which had trolley tracks in its center. By the time Owen was born, the settlement, named for an old willow tree by the inn, its roots watered by the creek that wandered toward Philadelphia, had been incorporated as a borough, and had grown streets parallel to the one his house was on—Second Street, and then Third and Fourth, climbing a hill where children sledded in winter, down the packed snow, bouncing through the barricaded intersections, until the ride ended with a spurt of sparks on a bed of cinders the borough crew had shovelled from a truck. The sparks, the packed snow, the Christmas trees in the front parlors all along the walk to school lasted for only a few days, scattered through a drab damp winter, but made memories that shaped the year and tugged time forward.

Warm weather lasted from March to October. Owen's little bedroom, with its wainscoted walls and single bookshelf, overlooked a vacant lot where he played with the other children of the neighborhood for an hour after supper in summer, in a milky twilight, the long grass scratchy, going to seed. Fungo, kick the can, touch football: girls played them all, since the neighborhood held more girls than boys. Once, in the lot's matted grasses, flattened and wet with dew—for it was fall, and school had begun—Owen came upon his own glasses, in the brown snap case that had vanished some days before. He had looked everywhere in the house, and his mother had confided what a grief it would be for his father to order and pay for a replacement pair. It was a miracle, it seemed to the child, bending down and taking the case, damp with its nights and days of waiting for him to find it, into his hand. Inside, yes, were the gold-rimmed disks that sharpened his sight, the little shapes of tortoiseshell that left dents in his noise, the curved metal handles that hurt his ears. Perhaps it was less than a miracle, for he took this diagonal path through the weeds every day to meet Buddy Rourke, his friend from the class above his, so they could walk to school together, away from the pack of girls from Second Street. Buddy had no father, which made him strange and slightly frightening. He was moody. He had straight brown hair that bristled forward and a mouth that never smiled, because of braces, shiny metal bands with a silver square in the middle of each tooth. Owen wanted to run back to tell his mother that he had found his glasses and his father wouldn't have to pay for new ones, but he didn't want to be late for Buddy, and hurried on, the recovered case making the pocket of his knickers damp.

From this same side of the house, early on another morning, he heard the sound of a shot, beyond the vacant lot. He had been sleeping. He seemed to awake in the moment *before* hearing, as if in a dream, the noise that had woken him; he had seen enough gangster movies to know the sound of gunpowder

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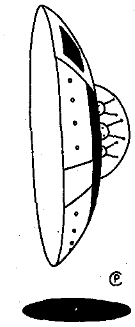
under percussion, but in the movies it came in machine-gun waves, whereas this was a single, lonely sound.



His parents heard it, too, for they stirred in their bedroom, beyond his closed door, and the two voices, male and female, intertwined and then fell silent again. It was not quite dark outside; the trees in the side yard had silhouettes, their masses welling into that wash of gray light, with a faint brown tinge to the sky, before birds began to twitter. The street was silent, devoid of traffic. Later, there was a siren, and later still the news, reported at breakfast by his father, who had been up the street newsgathering, that a young man in the Hoffmans' household, two doors up from the house next to the vacant lot, had shot himself, with a service revolver that Wes Hoffman had kept from his time in the Great War. Danny Hoffman was not yet twenty, but a child under his supervision at a summer camp had dived into shallow water and broken his neck, and his responsibility had haunted him, though it had happened a summer ago. Danny had never been the same; he had stayed in the house listening to the radio serials and had stopped looking for a job.

That was the explanation. In thirteen years of depression and world war, from 1932 to 1945, this was the most dramatic event in Owen's neighborhood. The woman across the street, Mrs. Yost, had a five-star flag in her front window, but all five soldier-sons came back safe. Skip Potteiger got Mary Lou Brumbach next door pregnant when she was only seventeen but then he married her so it was all right—by V-J Day the baby was in a carriage Mary Lou pushed back and forth on her way to the Acme, over the shallow troughs that carried roof water out to the gutter and the sidewalk squares the roots of the horse-chestnut trees were tilting up, tripping you on roller skates. On hot summer evenings the sounds of family quarrels would come across the street from the screened windows of the crowded row houses on the other side, the high side, up cement steps breaching retaining walls that leaned outward precariously, but there were no divorces, as Owen remembered; divorces were things that happened elsewhere, in Hollywood and New York, and were tragic scandals, producing what nobody and certainly no child wanted, broken homes. The very phrase had a sinful, terrible sound—a stone dropped into an abyss, into bombed houses such as filled the screen now in the newsreels at the Scheherazade. The world was full of sin, it seemed, and only the United States could put it right.

But there was no putting right, no reversing, the bullet with which Danny had ended his own life. That was the ultimate sin, the Bible said, according to Owen's Sunday-school teachers, especially Mr. Dickinson, who managed the bank. Killing yourself was worse than killing a man in self-defense, which was what the Yost boys were doing overseas. It was as if, on quiet Mifflin Street, where the horses still made their clip-clop sound early in the morning, a crater had opened up next to Owen's bedroom, a crater of terrible possibility, a denial of everything, of trees and birds and blue sky and the rest of nature. Buddy Rourke's father had fallen into that crater, but he hadn't intended to, or perhaps—it wasn't clear, and Buddy didn't want to talk about it—the father was still alive, but living somewhere else, with another family. He had, the word was, "strayed."

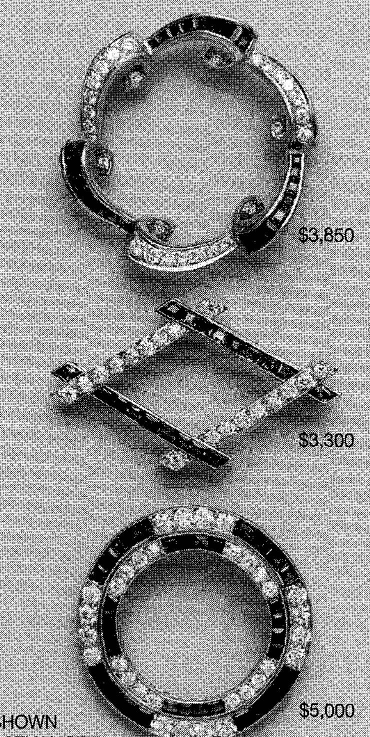
There was another kind of sin, also dizzying. On the back wall of the Willow playground equipment shed a child's red crayon had scribbled two penises (the word was), their tips touching. Close by, an older, more knowing hand had incised in a pencil that gouged its lines deep into the yellow-painted wood what looked like a swollen letter "M" but which, on examination, was a naked woman, legs bent at the knee and spread to reveal a slit, a pumpkin-seed shape, curls of hair around and above it, and below it a dot that Owen could not name even to himself, in the silence of his head, it was so shameful. Refining his idea, the artist showed between the thighs two breasts with blackened erect nipples and, between them, what Owen deciphered as the underside of a nose with its two nostrils. The woman was opening herself to be (as older boys said) fucked: that was clear. Why would she do this?—that was not clear. Yet it was certain that a woman somewhere had allowed herself to be viewed this helpless way and drawn so that this image could be created here. She had no arms or head and her ankles trailed off without feet; the artist felt these were inessential—the essential parts of her were depicted, and something stirred below Owen's belly in acknowledgment that this was true, what mattered most was shown. The slit, the hair, the little dot, and nipples aimed upward like stubby anti-aircraft guns.

Yet the girls all around him seemed remote from these essentials. They had brown legs from being at the playground all summer, and could run as fast as he. They liked to win at all the games—roof ball and box hockey and Chinese checkers. Ginger Bitting, a girl in his class from Second Street, would hang upside down from the jungle gym, hanging on with only her bent legs while her arms, thin and freckled with a whitish fuzz, reached down toward the dust and her long hair, reddish and fine like the dust, hung down between her arms. If her legs let go she would drop and might break her neck, like the boy at camp under poor Danny Hoffman's care. But she never did. Ginger with her freckles, and her eyes like green glass a light was shining through, was the most daring, the most wiry girl in his class at grade school, the fastest on her feet, the best singer, and the captain of the girls' team when the boys played them at recess soccer. If she stole his cap or plaid book bag on the way home from school he could never catch her until she let him. On the playground swing she would kick out and soar; the swing chains would snap and tug and shake the pipe frame, pulling her back from falling as she reached horizontal; still she kicked higher, her brown legs stiff. He watched her feet reach for the sky, in their creased and scuffed brown shoes. Back then, he could wear ankle-high sneakers, but girls wore real shoes, with laces and smooth soles.

The playground was approached from the alley behind Owen's house, on a path between two cornfields, and then along a kind of grassy road between the baseball bleachers and a row of cherry trees gone wild. Ginger would climb these trees in her slippery shoes, higher than Owen would ever dare. He would watch her as she ascended but he never saw up her shorts anything like the complicated business drawn on the back of the equipment shed. In the quiet, long-shadowed hour after the supervisor and the other children had gone home, and the equipment—the hockey sticks and Ping-Pong paddles and checker boards—was all locked up, he would experiment on the jungle gym, hanging by his arms and bent knees and daring himself to let go with his hands. But he never could. If he fell and broke his neck he would lie there all night, darkness and dew covering him, and be found only in the morning when the supervisor, young Miss Mull, arrived to run up the flag on the pole and lead the children in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ginger had satellites, though the girls with her perhaps did not think of themselves that way. Each probably thought of herself, though it was hard to believe, as the center of the universe, just as Owen did. There were a lot of Barbaras—Barbara Emerich, Barbara Jane Gross, Barbara Dolinski—and Alice Stottlemeyer and Georgene King and Carolyn McManus and Grace Bickta, all from Owen's street or the streets above, who collected on the sidewalks and walked together to elementary school and back. It was Alice Stottlemeyer, shorter than the others and, like Owen, saddled with glasses on her nose, who first kissed him with a secret meaning, a sort of push with her mouth, tight but soft, at a game of spin the bottle they were playing at somebody's birthday party, not Owen's. His own birthday parties, when his mother gave them, were usually disasters that sent him up the stairs to his room crying, because his guests were having more fun than he, the birthday boy, who had not received exactly the presents he had hoped for. His mother would never allow the game of spin the bottle. Their glasses clicked, his and Alice's, in the kiss while the other children crowded and jeered and then fell silent, seeing they were kissing seriously, all in a second. Then the bottle spun on, in the center of the ring they made, on the linoleum floor or painted concrete floor of the basement they were in, converted to a den or rumpus room.

That was one of the many social distinctions that crisscrossed Willow,



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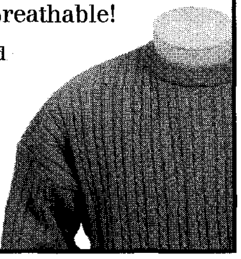

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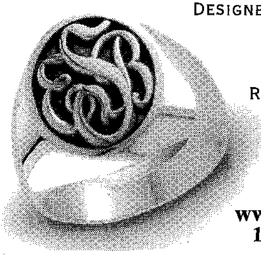

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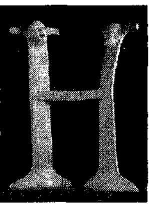

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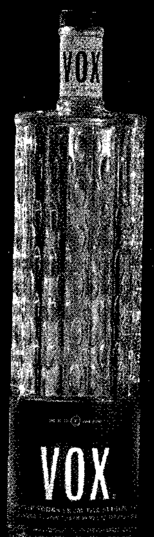

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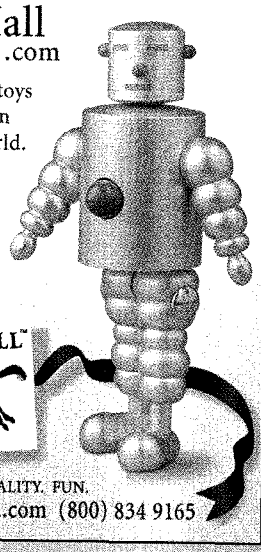

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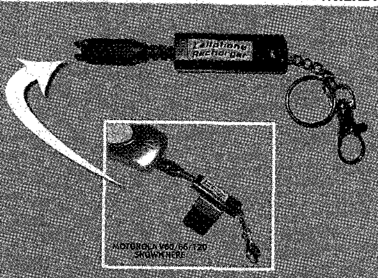

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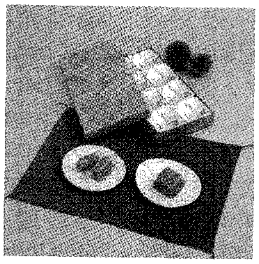

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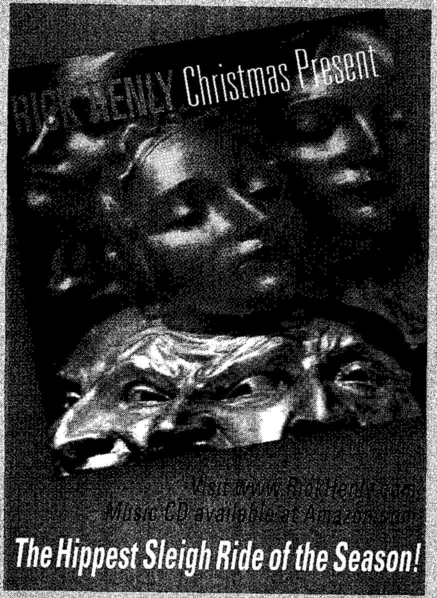

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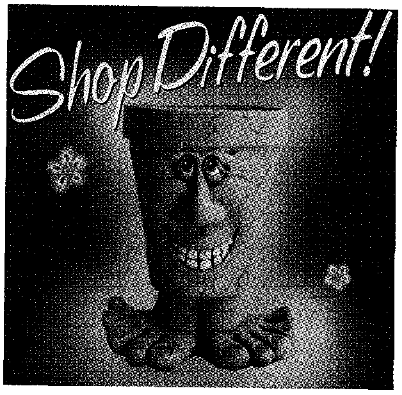

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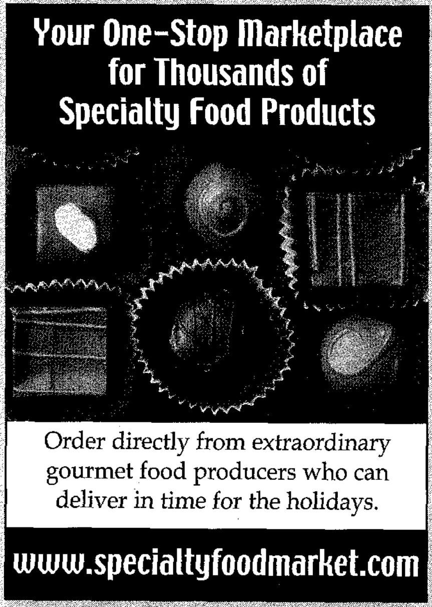

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the one between people who had basements converted into recreation rooms, with panelling and carpeting and easy chairs, and those who, like Owen's family, still had cellars, with a sinister bin of filthy coal and cobwebbed shelves of preserves in Mason jars and a spatter-painted old washing machine, tub-shaped and fitted with a wringer of rubber. The wet clothes would slowly emerge from between the two cylinders of white rubber like giant wrinkled tongues and spill into the wicker clothes basket. Owen, when younger than when Alice Stottlemeyer kissed him, and not yet envious of families with easy chairs and Ping-Pong tables and electric train tracks set up on plywood tables in their basements, was enchanted by the plugged-in washing machine's powerful, rhythmic back-and-forth beating action, stirring up a mass of bubbles, and the smell of soap flakes so strong it seemed to scour clean his head and sinuses, and the woody, springy scent of the wicker basket, with its handles so far apart he could not at first reach both at once. It was inevitable that someday he would stick his fingers in the wringer, and feel in a quick rush the relentless pressure climbing toward his wrist, and scream in terror. It was one of those moments like the gunshot in the night when the horror that lies beneath the sunny daily surface of things rises up, but not as bad: a safety device popped the wringers apart before his mother could dart around him and reach them.

He remained an admirer of the process, the wash that travelled through the wringer into the basket and up the cellar stairs through the bulkhead door into the back yard, where the white bedsheets hung about him like the billowing walls of a fragile castle, a jungle palace he was exploring all by himself; a shift of breeze in the back yard would cause the clothes pole to lean in a different direction, so that his face was brought into abrupt contact with the towering, damp, light-flooded cotton. Handing up clothespins to Momma or Grammy, who lived with them, was one of his first ways of being useful.

It was too bad that Alice wasn't prettier and taller, and that like Owen she got good marks at school. She was bright, which made her dull. He was drawn to the daredevil girls from families his own looked down on, because of some whispered ancestral taint or scandal or because the father drank or did manual labor or was not nice to the mother. Did this not-niceness take the form of hitting her, or calling her names, or something else, furtive and dirty, that happened? Even in Willow, let alone Alton, there were places, bars and pool halls and bowling alleys, that smelled of misbehavior, of murky transaction. In the nameless gravel alley that ran beside the hedge of Owen's yard and then at a right angle behind the asbestos-shingled chicken house his grandfather had built when he first moved to town from the country, and then past several garages and small barns at the bottom of people's yards, and a small asphalt-shingled shack, called a gun shop, where a one-eyed man named Smokey Frye noisily pounded and ground metal at the odd hours he was present, there was a hand-painted windowless cinder-block building that a sign above the door identified as the Gifford Pinchot Wildlife Society, from which drifted the sounds of men drinking and playing cards. The grownups of Willow needed their fun, and for young people there was the Recreation Hall, the Rec Hall, opposite the elementary school, where kids older than Owen danced and played pinball and Ping-Pong and it was said that a girl two classes ahead of his, Carol Wisniewski, let herself be fucked by Marty Naftzinger standing up, there in the shadowy gritty space between the Rec Hall and the factory building beside it, where they made hosiery and then, during the war, parachutes.

Willow during the war, as Owen went from nine to thirteen, was like a prairie town brushed by black clouds that swept low overhead but did not discharge their tornado, though at the Scheherazade there were newsreels of airplanes turning cities into fields of fire and of G.I.s storming sandy island beaches strafed by fanatical Japanese who had to be burned out of their caves with flamethrowers like nests of insects. While the great Eurasian continent from end to end seethed with violence and moving masses and the oceans drank torpedoed ships, North America held its breath, a land of women and children and old men and price controls and rationing tokens and war stamps and Hollywood comedians on the radio. Yet the tingle of global gambles filled the air and infected their island of peace; there was a speeding up, a sense of stakes higher than the old proprieties. Carol Wisniewski let herself be fucked by Marty Naftzinger standing

"Sometimes it would be helpful if you were a bit more androgynous."

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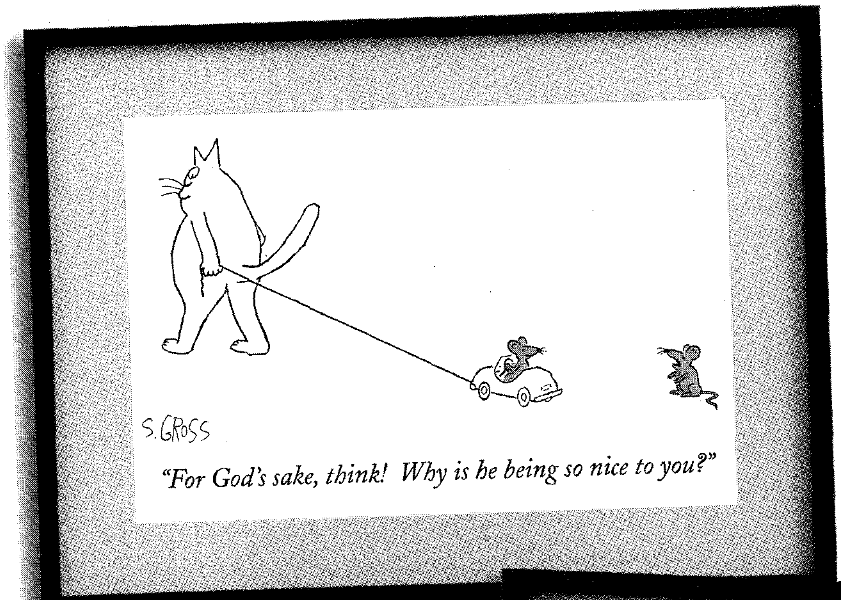
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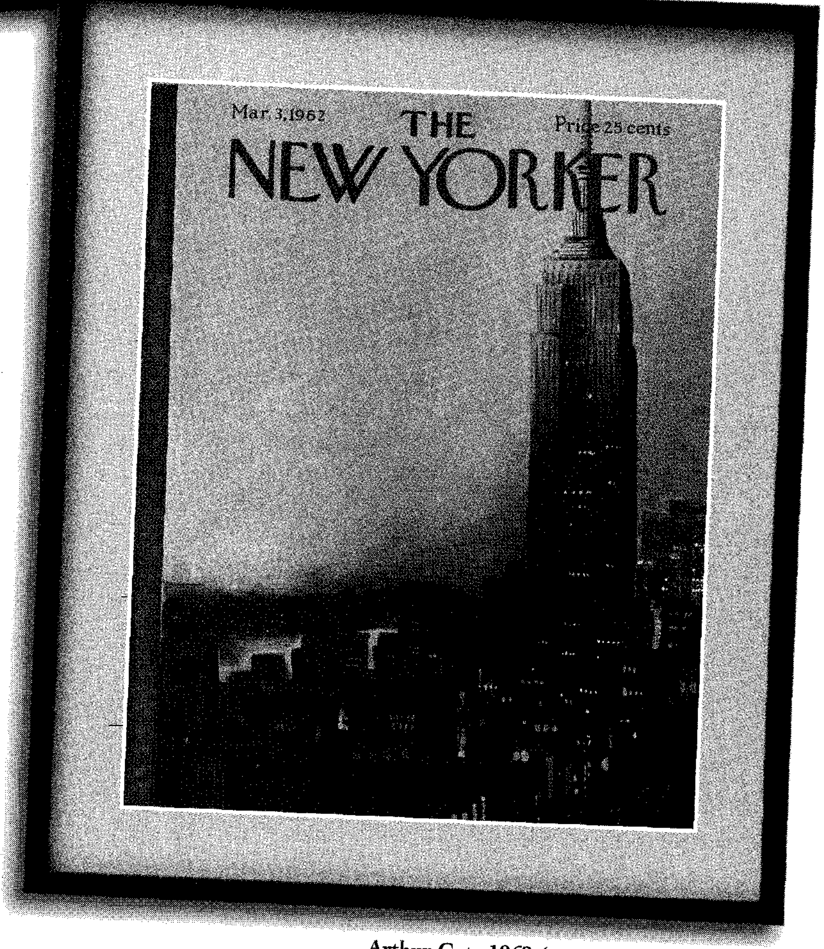

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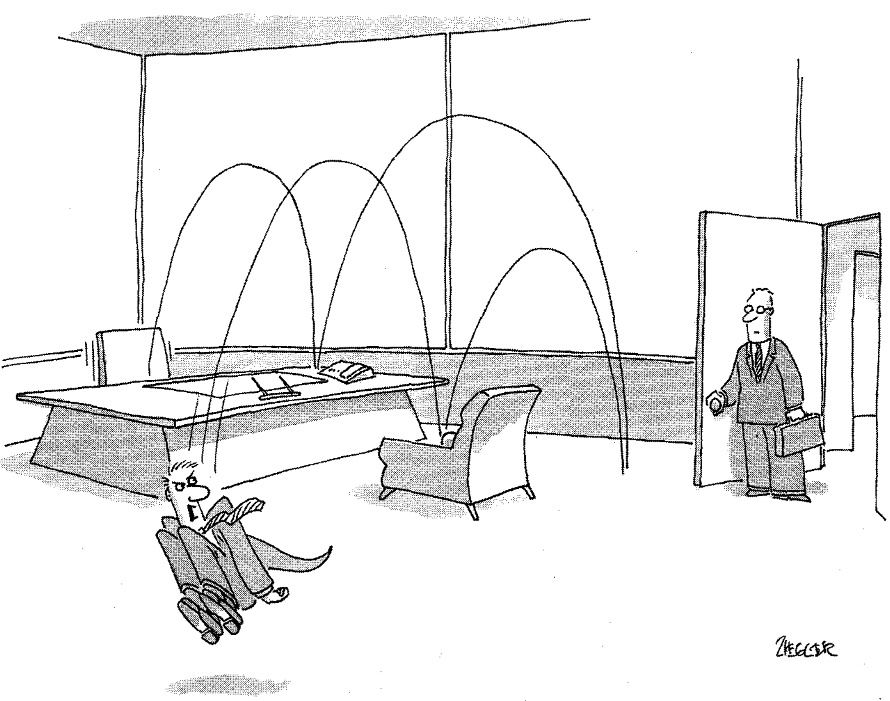


"You may be a big shot at the New York office, Miller, but here in Des Moines we do things differently."

• •

up, and Momma took a job at the parachute factory and did plane-spotting on the roof of the fire station, playing solitaire with a special deck of cards, and Daddy put on a warden's helmet in air-raid drills looking for light leaks from the windows along Mifflin Street. Owen took the paper off tin cans and jumped on them, flattening them on the cement floor of the chicken house for the war effort, while the chickens rustled and cackled on their crusty rungs, or in the cubbyholes where glass eggs lured them into laying more. The eggs—brown, speckled, dabbled with dung—Grammy sold in reused paper egg cartons to her relatives, and the flattened tin cans piled up on the school grounds, making a shining mountain that only Eddie Kroninger, the three-star general of fifth-grade scrap collection, was allowed to climb.

When Owen suggested to Buddy Rourke that he donate his braces to the scrap drive, Buddy didn't think it was funny. Buddy was a serious boy, headed for a career in engineering or construction or electricity. He could fix lamps and knew how to splice the wires of Christmas lights when a bad socket made the whole string dark. He taught Owen how to do this, taming a current that would flow one way, with magical, instant results, but which, with contacts reversed, would balk and melt the wires. Though the two could achieve great rapport working on projects in Buddy's cellar—not quite a rumpus room but better lit than Owen's, with a well-stocked workbench that had been created and abandoned by Buddy's absent father—there was a potential awkwardness in the relationship owing to Buddy's being older. Once, anticipating Buddy's coming to his house one afternoon to play Monopoly—a game the boys for a season were passionate about, before they discovered chess and gin rummy—Owen had set up the board on the living-room rug with a loving elaboration, arranging the Chance and Community Chest cards in a spiral, like the staircases in Hollywood musicals, and setting out the red hotels and green wooden houses in a formal pattern, a perfect Christmas-colored village seen from an airplane.

Buddy, coming into the room, said with limpid disgust, "Oh, Owie!," and scrabbled the cards into the usual rough stack and dumped the hotels and houses back into the box. Owen was stung, and from then on tried not to overcommit himself to a relationship, or show how much he cared. Make sure the circuits are established before plugging anything in: otherwise, meltdown.

Once, after a fight over something, leaving the basement in tears, Owen heard himself yelling at Buddy, the crowning insult, "At least I have a father!"

To taunt his friend with this, his lack of a father—he was appalled at himself. Shame bubbled up like mucky black water when his foot went through thin ice in the swamp beyond the high-school grounds. This had happened to him on a walk. His parents took walks on Sunday afternoons, and dragged him along, though the very prospect made his legs heavy, and he would lag behind so far that his father would eventually double back and lift him up onto his shoulders. It felt so high up there, and his father's head so strangely large and hairy, that after a while he was happy to return to the earth on his own legs. There were several routes the walk could take. One way was to turn down the nameless alley beyond their hedge and walk across Alton Avenue and through the newer section of Willow to Shale Hill and climb it, if they had the energy. There were victory gardens along the base but, up higher, paths wandered between pines and flat rocks that reminded him of unmade beds or sliding stacks of newspapers getting wrinkled in the rain. Another way led across town to the farmers'-market sheds and a stream dammed to make a pond that held a pair of swans. People fed them, with crackers or crusty bread; his mother said it made the swans dependent on a food source outside of nature and so was wrong. A third way had Owen and his parents turning right at the gap in the hedge and going up Mifflin Street past the Baker farm pigsties with their terrible smell, past the creek where it was solid green with watercress that Grammy sometimes gathered, to a road that took them up to Cedar Top, which faced Shale Hill across the valley that held Willow. Beyond the town bounds, unpainted houses held rusting cars in their slanted yards and mangy dogs barked and barked as the three of them passed; then came a stretch of woods, and a hilltop intersection where a Pen-Supreme ice-cream stand had been abandoned. They would turn right and head back downhill, through more woods, and pass, on the left, the spiky sandstone wall of the Pomeroy estate—once or twice Owen heard the sound of a tennis ball back and forth, and the splashing of a swimming pool, but usually nobody seemed to be home; the lives of the rich were hard to imagine—and then on the right the Willow cemetery, its granite stones, pale pink and pale gray, sharp-cornered and bald in the sunlight. Owen's heart always lifted, and the weight fell off his legs, when he and his parents came into the middle of Willow, which he walked through every school day, and which he could reconstruct store by store, house by house, in his mind's eye sixty years afterward.

It was near the top of the Cedar Top walk one day, just after the forsaken ice-cream stand, that Owen noticed in the grit at the side of the road a milky-white thing like a collapsed balloon; it had the glossy look of a toy. He bent down to look closer and his mother, behind and above him, said, "*Don't touch it!*" in the voice she reserved for extreme urgency and rebuke. What could be the danger? It was not alive but her voice suggested that it somehow was.

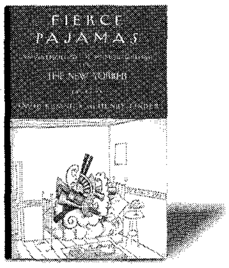
"What is it?" he asked.

"Something batsy," she said.

"Batsy" was a pretend word, a private word, coined when he could not yet pronounce everything and made words up without meaning to, having to do with food he didn't like, that he thought too runny or mixed up or like guts to eat. He must have meant "bad" mixed with "nasty," but the word had stuck, as if describing a reality that couldn't be touched by the tongue with an actual word. Fresh bird doo-doo on the rim of the stone birdbath was another batsy thing.

"What was it for?" he asked, the past tense showing an awareness of something discarded, of something whose mysterious moment of use was past.

Both his parents were silent as the three of them walked onward, leaving the fascinating rubbery thing behind in the roadside grit. They were the kind of parents, not like the parents of some children he knew, who thought it wrong not to answer a child's ques-



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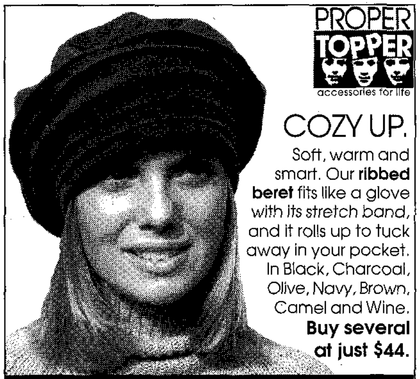

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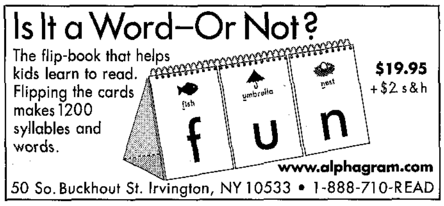
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tions. He could feel guilt eating at them.

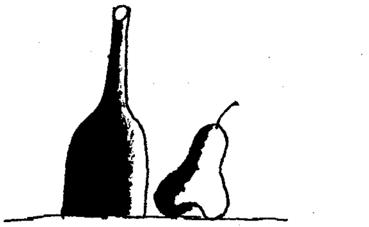
"It was for tidiness, Owen," his father at last said. "Like a Kleenex."

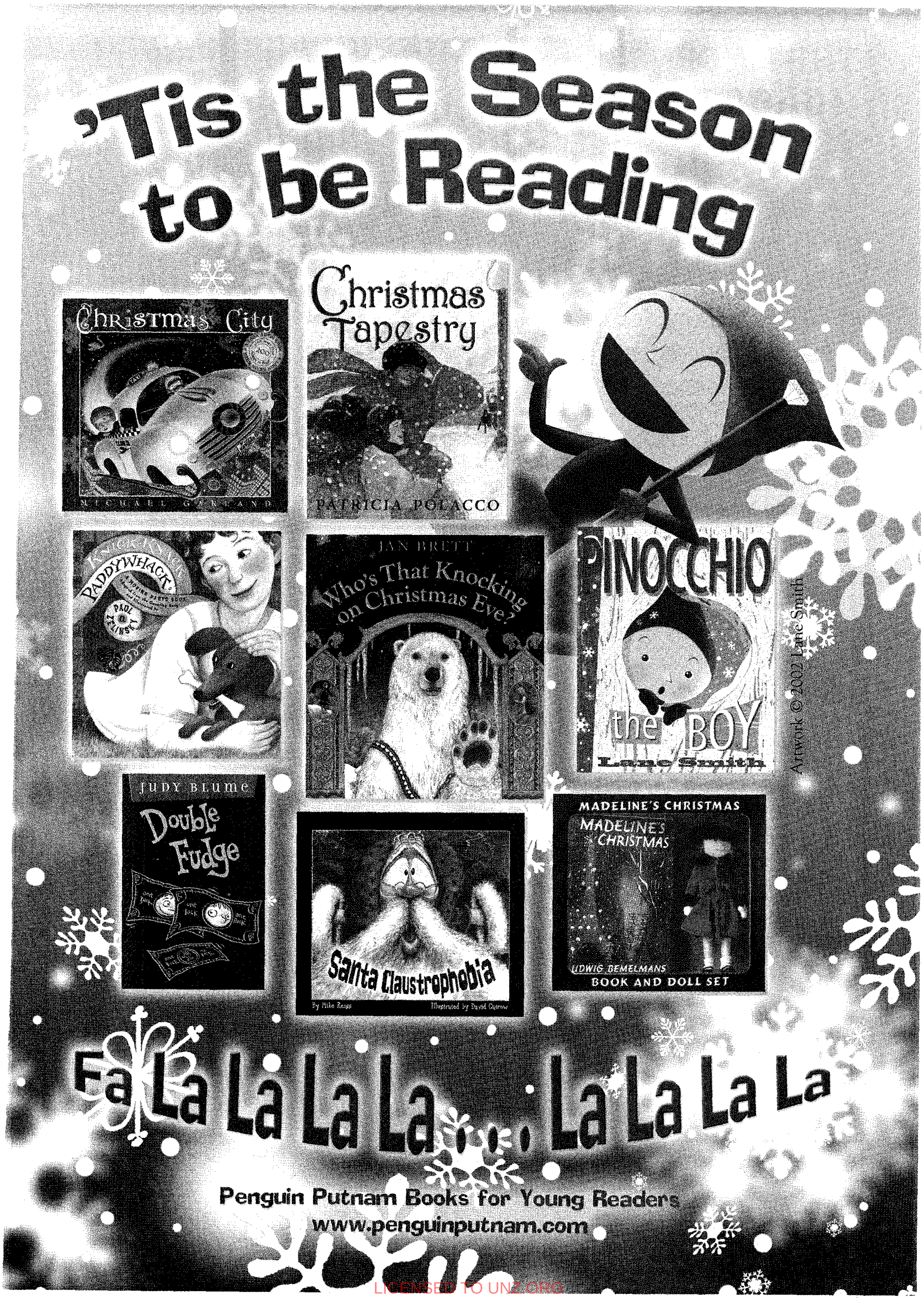
"They call them stork-stoppers," his mother added, her voice better-humored now, laced with a girlish complicity. He could feel his parents behind him drawn closer in their secret knowledge. Usually it was he and his mother who had the secrets, the complicity, in all those hours when his father was absent at work. Her unhappiness was the main secret, though what exactly she was unhappy about he could not quite guess. It was almost as if just being a woman was enough to cause unhappiness. There were days when his mother went to bed and lay there with her eyes shut. He stayed away from her bedroom when this was the case, but his little room could be reached only by walking through his parents', and their exchanges unignorably seeped into his ears—the brisk thrusts and counter-thrusts of a quarrel, the sighs and groans of weariness in the evening, the playful chatter that began the day. He was happy to have her love him more than she did his father, but he wanted things to be friendly between the two grownups, so that after a nightmare they could comfort him by letting him into the warm space between them in their bed.

As he grew, he discovered more places in Willow where sin cast its shadow. On top of the equipment shed at the playground there was a triangular space, under the pavilion roof, that you could boost yourself into only by jumping and grabbing a crossbeam and swinging your feet up, hanging in midair dangerously for a second, and then leveraging your body onto the top of the shed. As your eyes adjusted, you saw there were more drawings, never painted over, and written messages and allegations, involving girls and boys too old for him to have known. Ginger Bitting sometimes scrambled up here, and it was pleasant to stretch out imagining her beside him, and looking down the perspective of the beaded boards to the macadam pavilion floor.

In the seventh grade, he left the elementary school and went to the high-school building half a mile down the avenue toward Alton. Though girls and boys could enter any of the doors and use the grounds without the sexual division enforced on the elementary-school playground, a certain air of scandal clung to the lower windows on the side of the high school toward Alton, under the corner classroom. They were the windows of the girls' locker room, reinforced with chicken wire and painted black on the inside. Yet cracks in the aging paint appeared, and small holes were mysteriously scratched in it, from the inside. Though there was no written prohibition, teachers shooed boys away from these windows, and the space, with its mowed grass and narrow sidewalk, gathered such a thick, contagious aura of rumored glimpse and determined spying that Owen emerged into adult life with a distinct memory, like an Ingres seraglio, of naked girls seen at an angle, past several dusty asbestos-coated pipes and the green tops of metal lockers, their shining shoulders and shower-wet flanks—Barbara Emerich and Alice Stottlemeyer and Georgene King and Grace Bickta but somehow not Ginger Bitting, girls he had grown up with, moving slowly in their budding nudity, oblivious, as if underwater.

Though his mother, a great believer in nature, often walked around naked on her way to and from the bathroom, and when he was a toddler would share the tub with him, little Owen had curiously little idea of what a woman's body looked like, as if, she being his mother, a heavy veil intervened. It was only females his age he could see, and who could guide him. Once, wrestling on the baked late-summer playground grass, after Miss Mull had gone home, with Doris Shanahan, a square-faced tomboy from the B-section of the eighth grade who whistled riding her bike and liked to hang around shooting baskets with boys, he looked up her shorts as she stood triumphant over him, straddling his face, and saw, thanks to her underpants being loose, a few curly black hairs: it was as if he had never seen pubic hair before. He himself still had none. His seeing Doris's was a sin, he knew, but it made him happy, and was real. It was knowledge, and knowledge, all the local authorities agreed, was good to have. ♦

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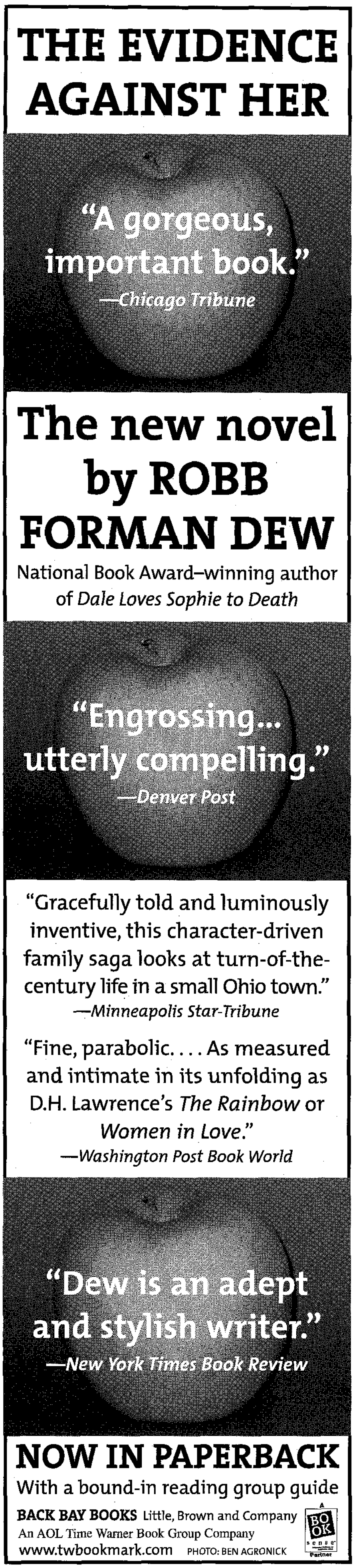

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Independent bookstores nationwide will be welcoming shoppers in droves in the coming weeks. Book Sense, the collective voice of this dynamic community, provides a distillation of the insightful and informed recommendations of thousands of independent booksellers in its popular Book Sense 76 list. From future best-sellers to literary gems just off little-known presses, the booklist offers something for everyone.

A sampling of this year's Book Sense 76 holiday list follows, along with additional recommendations from leading publishers. Browse the items and, if in doubt, just ask your independent bookseller.

LITERARY EVENTS

Hollywood is known to pack its end-of-the-year calendar with the sort of art films destined for Oscar greatness. Literature follows suit this season with some much anticipated books by Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winners competing for attention with other literary finds.

In his new book, "Ignorance" (HarperCollins Publishers), Milan Kundera ponders the perils of memory and nostalgia when, after twenty years in exile, two Czechs return to Prague amid the political thaw that transformed Eastern Europe. Calling it both humorous and tragic, Shawn Wathen of **Chapter One Book Store** in Hamilton, MT, says Kundera's latest novel "confirms again his place among the great philosophical novelists of contemporary Europe."

The Portuguese Nobel Prize winner José Saramago delivers another imaginative foray into a frighteningly surrealistic future with "The Cave" (Harcourt). An elderly potter and his family move from a small village into the nearby urban colossus that promises everything necessary for happiness. What they discover is quite the contrary. "Saramago's humanity and foreboding shine through in the translation by Margaret Jull Costa," notes Janet Koehne of **Joseph-Beth Booksellers** in Cincinnati.

The ripple effect of great literature in a repressive society is the exquisite theme of Dai Sijie's "Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress" (Anchor Books). Exiled to the countryside during Mao's Cultural Revolution, two boys discover a hidden cache of Western classics whose forbidden pleasures prove irresistibly seductive. William Horan of **Book Passage** in Corte Madera, CA, calls this "the literary stocking stuffer of our list."

A MINOTAUR OUT OF WATER

A stock comic device in storytelling is the unlikely transplant of characters into strange and alien environments. This scenario generally provides plenty of laughs as well as offering fresh insights. That's definitely the case with some fish-out-of-water tales being released this fall.

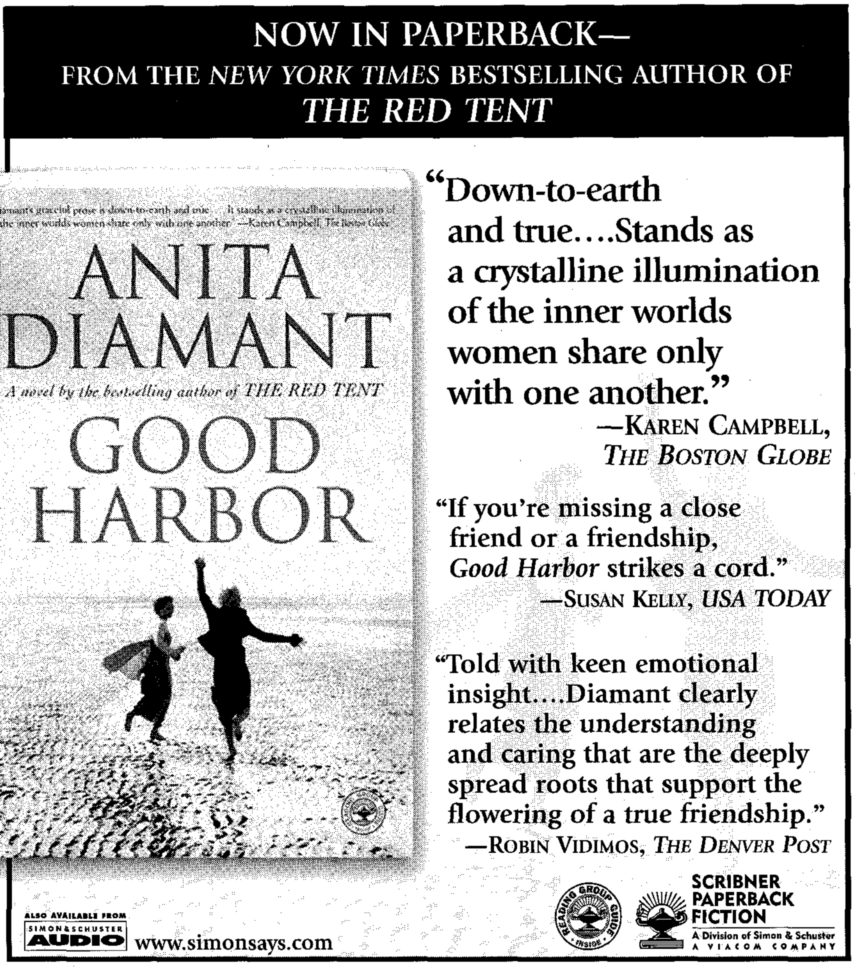
In a case of "Green Acres" gone metric, Wendy Holden's "Farm Fatale" (Plume) charts the bucolic adventures of a madcap cast of misfits that converge on an English farm. Babette Hiestand of **R. J. Julia's Booksellers** in Madison, CT, adores this "contemporary satire peopled with a reclusive pop star, a couple anxious to flee London, a nosy postman, a 'never-was' movie star, and a host of other eccentrics."

An unlikely but intriguing premise inspires Steven Sherrill's "The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break" (Picador USA). Desperate for some new scenery outside of his Cretan labyrinth, the mythical minotaur cuts a deal to serve a stint as a line cook in a steak house. Writes Marian Fleischman of **Sedalia Books & Toy** in Sedalia, MO, "What he learns about being human in this surrealistic but somehow plausible novel is a lesson for us all."

PROSE PORTRAITS

The inspired nuance with which biographers depict the lives of their chosen subjects often results in portraits as revealing as any painting or photograph. Three new nonfictional works chronicle the ambitions, obsessions, and dreams of a politician, a power broker, and a painter named Pablo.

Al Smith lived the ultimate American life, rising from the poverty of New York's Lower East Side through the tainted ranks of Tammany Hall to the governor's mansion, and on to the very doorsteps of the White House. Rhett Jackson of **The**



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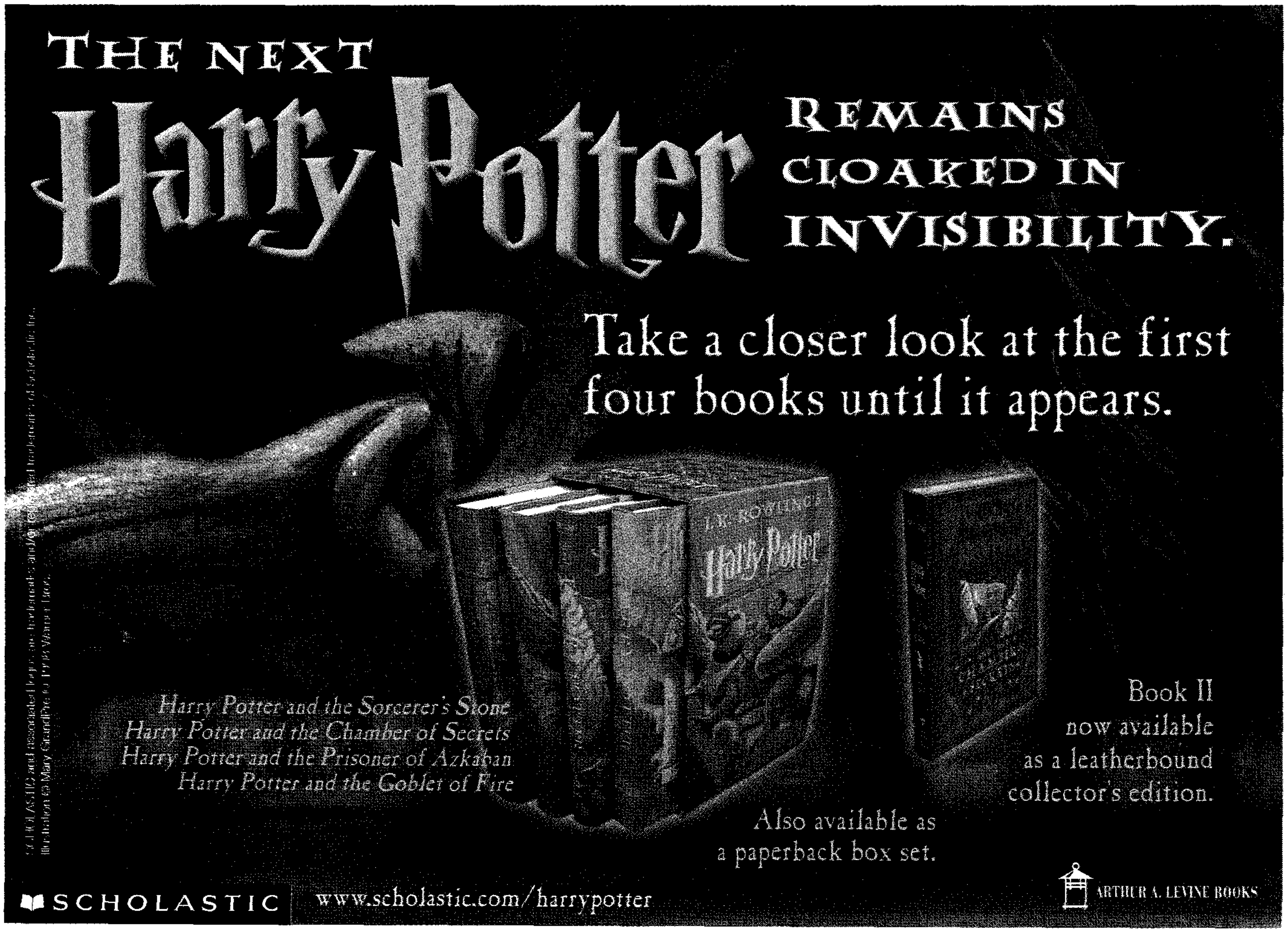

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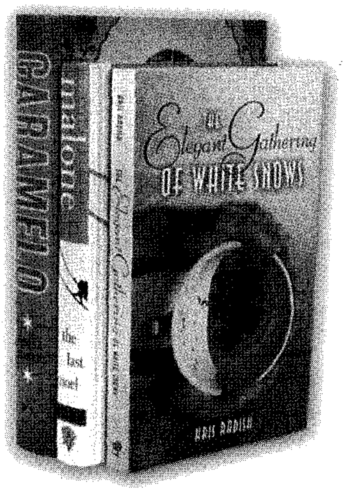
Happy Bookseller in Columbia, SC, calls Christopher M. Finan's "Alfred E. Smith: The Happy Warrior" (Hill & Wang) "one of the best biographies I've read in years," adding, "The history of New York City in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries is wonderful."

A drive down Highway 1 as it snakes its way acoss the Florida Keys reveals the shattered remnants of the dreams of industrialist Henry Flagler. Les Standiford tells the tale of Flagler's doomed quest in "The Last Train to Paradise: Henry Flagler and the Spectacular Rise and Fall of the Railroad that Crossed an Ocean" (Crown Publishers). Notes Rick Laliberte of **Books & Books** in Coral Gables, FL, "With the narrative skill of the accomplished novelist he is, Standiford recreates the daily lives of the people caught up in Flagler's obsession—from the engineers who solved seemingly impossible problems to the laborers who hacked through dense saw grass and built the ocean-spanning bridges to Key West."

"Behind every masterpiece there is a story," reflects Tattered Cover's Neil Strandberg. Recommending Russell Martin's "Picasso's War: The Destruction of Guernica and the Masterpiece That Changed the World" (Dutton), he says, "Martin marvelously shows the deep connection between people and history, revealing the relationships between Picasso, the Spanish Civil War, and the painting, 'Guernica.'"

FICTION UNDER WRAPS



The gift of the right novel can be as transporting as a plane ticket, and the destinations available for the holidays span the gamut of space and time.

An epic novel that chronicles three generations of a twentieth-century Mexican family—both north and south of the border—is Sandra Cisneros's "Caramelo" (Alfred A. Knopf). The book drew the attention of Elise White of **Orinda Books** in Orinda, CA. "The Mexico and United States that Cisneros portrays are new to us. Toot horns! Blow whistles! Beat drums! This is a superb novel," she says enthusiastically.

In Kris Radish's "The Elegant Gathering of White Snows" (Spinsters Ink Books), a group of Wisconsin women gather for an informal Bible study group. At one point, they decide to go for a walk, and just keep going. "I wish I could buy a copy for every woman I've ever met," notes Susan Wasson of **Bookworks** in Albuquerque, NM. "I am so in love with this book, the women's stories, and their relationships with each other."

And finally, the holidays themselves serve as the setting for a charming old-fashioned love story set in North Carolina from 1963 to the present. Integrating all of the cultural and political chaos of these turbulent times, Michael Malone's "The Last Noel" (Sourcebooks Landmark) recounts the tale of twelve Christmas meetings of a man and woman. "Funny, joyful, and touching," says Mary Holtermann of **Harry W. Schwartz Bookshop** in Brookfield, WI, who calls this quite simply, "the perfect Christmas gift."

For more information on the complete Book Sense 76 recommendation list, consult with your local independent bookseller, call 888-BookSense toll free, or visit **www.BookSense.com.**

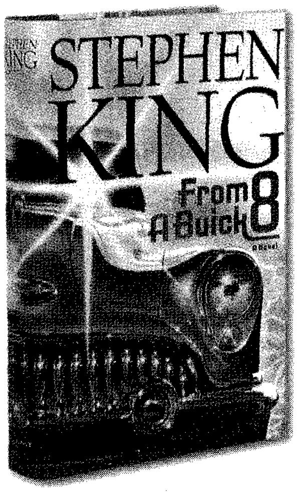
Publishers' Picks

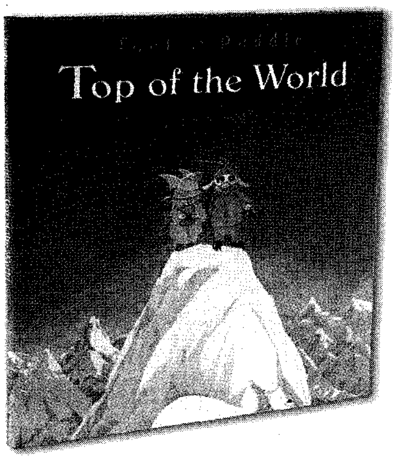
- Jon Lee Anderson arrived in Afghanistan ten days before U.S. bombers began pounding Al Qaeda and Taliban forces. His compelling reports from the fractured nation now in the headlines are collected in **The Lion's Grave: Dispatches from Afghanistan** (Grove Press).

- A new edition of **The Forsyte Saga** by John Galsworthy (Scribner Paperback Fiction) is now available as a companion to the new Masterpiece Theatre production. One of the most enduring literary classics from the twentieth century, with brilliant social satire, the volume encompasses all three Forsyte novels including "The Man of Property," "In Chancery," and "To Let."

- The recent seventeenth edition of **Bartlett's Familiar Quotations** (Little, Brown and Company) delivers the definitive collection of quotes from people past and present. Edited by Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer Justin Kaplan, this edition adds the bon mots of "Seinfeld" to those of Shakespeare.

- Stephen King's latest, **From a Buick 8** (Scribner), relates the dark tale of supernatural occurrences that emanate from a mysterious Buick '54 Roadmaster locked up in a shed in rural Pennsylvania. The Buick isn't a car at all, but a portal to another world.





- Holly Hobbie's winsome pigs are travelling again! In **Toot & Puddle: Top of the World** (Little, Brown and Company), Puddle must find his fearless friend, Toot, who leaves for a walk one morning and doesn't return. Puddle enlists nearly every mode of transport to track down his missing pal.

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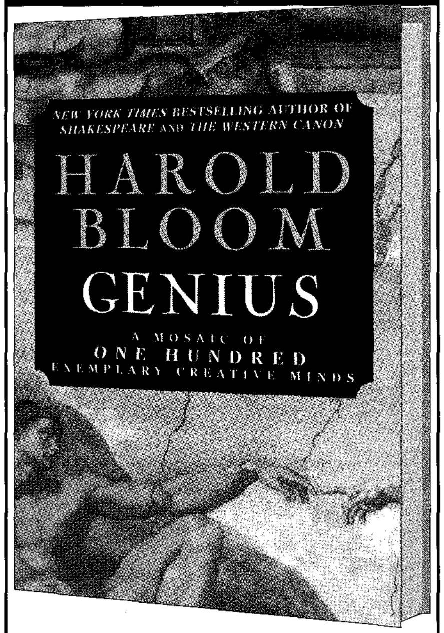
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*New York Times Book Review**

"A colossus among critics.... His enthusiasm for literature is a joyous intoxicant."
—*New York Times Magazine*

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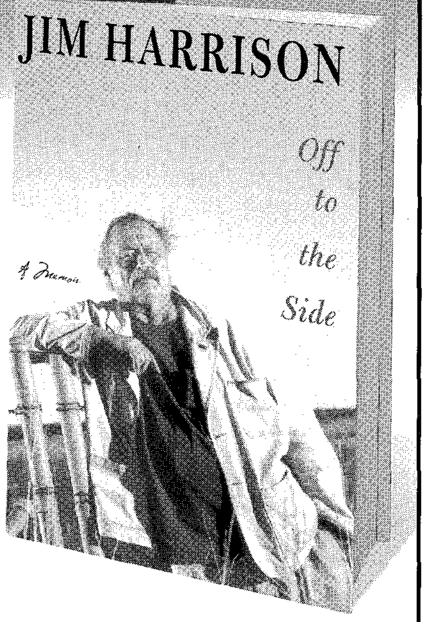
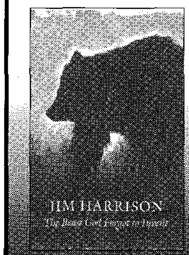
Jim Harrison's long-awaited memoir


JIM HARRISON
Off to the Side

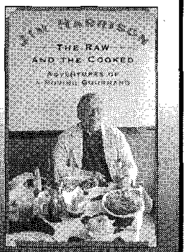
"No one has advanced and expanded the American literary ethos in the latter part of the twentieth century more cogently, usefully, and just plain brilliantly than Jim Harrison. . . . This is a matter to which all literate Americans should pay serious attention." —Hayden Carruth

"Harrison is never less than intriguing. This fine memoir is a worthy capstone to a fascinating career." —*Publishers Weekly*

A TOP TEN 76 PICK BOOK sense


JIM HARRISON
The Beast God Forgot to Invent

The Beast God Forgot to Invent


JIM HARRISON
THE RAW AND THE COOKED
ADVENTURES OF A ROVING GOURMAND

The Raw and the Cooked

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Publishers' Picks

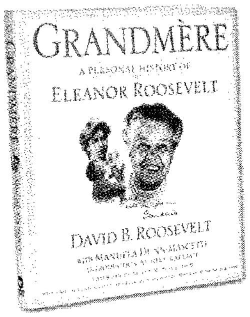
Four Sisters of Hofei
A History
ANNPING CHIN

- In **Four Sisters of Hofei: A History** by Annping Chin (Scribner), the four elderly Chang sisters recall nearly a century of life in China. Drawing on family letters, diaries, and journals, esteemed Yale historian Chin provides an intimate look at a nation in motion.

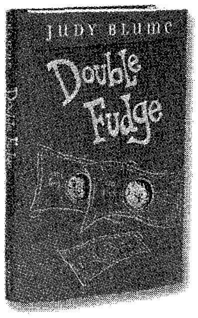
THE THREE QUESTIONS

- The rarefied wisdom of Tolstoy provides the soul of a new picture book. Based on a Tolstoy story, **The Three Questions** (Scholastic Press), written and illustrated by Jon J. Muh, relates the tale of a boy whose encounter with an old turtle reveals some universal truths.

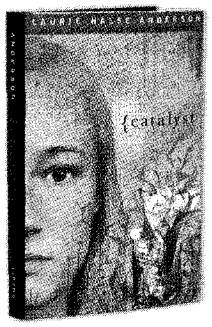
- Ian Falconer's No. 1 New York *Times* best-seller **Olivia Saves the Circus** (Anne Schwartz/Atheneum Books for Young Readers) takes fans to the Big Top with everyone's favorite "pig with panache" (Kirkus Reviews).


GRANDMÈRE
A PERSONAL HISTORY OF
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
DAVID B. ROOSEVELT

- Imagine if one of the most admired women in the world also happened to be your grandmother? Such was the experience of David B. Roosevelt. In his new book with Manuela Dunn-Mascetti, **Grandmère: A Personal History of Eleanor Roosevelt** (Warner Books), he shares a unique look at Eleanor along with rarely seen family photographs.


JUDY BLUME
Double Fudge

- From best-selling writer Judy Blume, **Double Fudge** (Dutton Children's Books) provides another take on the nearly six-year-old hurricane, Farley Drexel Hatcher, known to his intimates as "Fudge." This time he's dreaming up ways to make enough "Fudge Bucks" to buy the whole world (or at least Toys "R" Us) when he discovers he has a cousin named Farley Drexel Hatcher too. Another "Fudge" translates into double the trouble.


LAURIE HALSE ANDERSON
{catalyst}

- If there's a problem, Kate Malone in Laurie Halse Anderson's **Catalyst** (Viking) can handle it. She's a minister's daughter, gets straight-As, and has a boyfriend who's been accepted to Harvard. But when MIT—the only college she's applied to—hasn't told her if she's been accepted and when arch-rival neighbors get burned out of their home and move in, tension mounts. For the first time, Kate is forced to soul search.

Book Sense 76

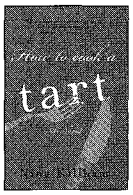
INDEPENDENT BOOKSELLER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Top Ten recommendations from the November/December Book Sense 76, as voted by independent booksellers.

BALZAC AND THE LITTLE CHINESE SEAMSTRESS

1. BALZAC AND THE LITTLE CHINESE SEAMSTRESS

by Sijie Dai (Anchor, $10 paper) "A delightful story about love and anarchy in Maoist China. Two boys exiled to the countryside during the height of Mao's cultural revolution find a hidden stash of Western classics in translation, and these seductive retellings of Balzac become their forbidden treasures."—WILLIAM HORAN, BOOK PASSAGE, CORTE MADERA, CA



3. HOW TO COOK A TART: A Novel

by Nina Killham (Bloomsbury, $21.95) "Here is a tasty little morsel of a novel, a food farce, spiced with just enough social commentary on body image and nutrition to be both provocative and funny. Throw in the odd murder for garnish, and the effect is a fun read and a great gift. Don't miss it."—MARGARET SHINDLER, ECOLA SQUARE BOOKS, CANNON BEACH, OR

JIM HARRISON

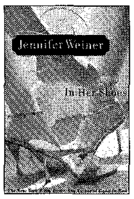
5. OFF TO THE SIDE: A Memoir

by Jim Harrison (Grove, $25) "This is my favorite book by Harrison because this beautifully written memoir is most like listening to him speak. I found sentences on each page that break the world open, that glitter in the darkness. The French are masters of the aphorism—that short, provisional conclusion about experience—but I don't know of any other contemporary American writer who does it as well as Jim Harrison."—KARL POHRT, SHAMAN DRUM BOOKSELLERS, ANN ARBOR, MI

THE LITTLE FRIEND
DONNA TARTT

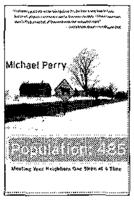
7. THE LITTLE FRIEND

by Donna Tartt (Knopf, $26) "Harriet DuFresne's older brother was killed when she was a baby. Now 12, sharp-tongued, bony, and aggressive, she is obsessed with finding the murderer. With a plot littered with vague aunts, and ghosts of times past, this is a strange, compelling read, acute in its observations on life and love and the vagaries of a small Mississippi town."—KATHY ASHTON, THE KING'S ENGLISH BOOKSHOP, SALT LAKE CITY, UT



9. IN HER SHOES

by Jennifer Weiner (Atria/S&S, $25) "I don't know whether to congratulate Jennifer Weiner on another blockbuster of a novel, or cuss her out for my puffy eyelids after going through the sister/family roller coaster. With this hilarious tearjerker, she has established herself as the queen of woman's fiction!"—SALLY BREWSTER, LITTLE PROFESSOR /PARK PLACE BOOKS, CHARLOTTE, NC

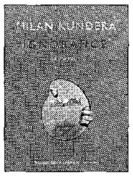


2. POPULATION 485: Meeting Your Neighbors One Siren at a Time

by Michael Perry (HarperCollins, $24.95) "Perry has brought us to a town rich with history and personality, and he recounts his family's lives as volunteer firefighters. It would seem that this would result in a memoir of sorrow and pain, as the town's history unfolds from disaster to disaster, but instead, it is a story of great humility, humor, and humanity."—RUSS HARVEY, CODY'S BOOKS, BERKELEY, CA

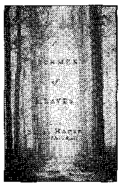
4. LYDIA CASSATT READING THE MORNING PAPER

by Harriet Scott Chessman (Plume, $13 paper) "Mary Cassatt's sister, Lydia, was her model for many paintings. Chessman explores the close relationship between the sisters; Lydia is extremely ill and both women are coming to terms with her impending death. This novel is a gem."—KATE CERINO, PAULINA SPRINGS BOOK CO., SISTERS, OR



6. IGNORANCE

by Milan Kundera (HarperCollins, $23.95) "Kundera's latest book confirms again his place among the great philosophical novelists of contemporary Europe. Kundera writes about two Czech exiles returning to their native land following the collapse of Communism. He explores a feast of ideas, all relating to the concept of knowledge. Wonderfully written, humorous and tragic, this insightful novel is one of his best."—SHAWN WATHEN, CHAPTER ONE BOOK STORE, HAMILTON, MT



8. A PARCHMENT OF LEAVES

by Silas House (Algonquin, $23.95) "Silas House creates a beautiful and deeply memorable character in the Cherokee woman who narrates this powerful book. Every evening, I longed to return to her world in the Kentucky mountains, as treacherous as that world becomes. House transcends time and place; allow yourself to be taken away by his writing."—AMANDA TOBIER, THIRD PLACE BOOKS, LAKE FOREST, WA

malone
the last noel

10. THE LAST NOEL

by Michael Malone (Sourcebooks, $19.95) "A beautiful love story and perfect Christmas gift. Set in North Carolina, it spans 1963 to the present, with the culture and politics of those years woven into the story. Noni and Kaye's meetings over 12 Christmases are funny, joyful, and touching."—MARY HOLTERMANN, HARRY W. SCHWARTZ BOOKSHOP, BROOKFIELD, WI

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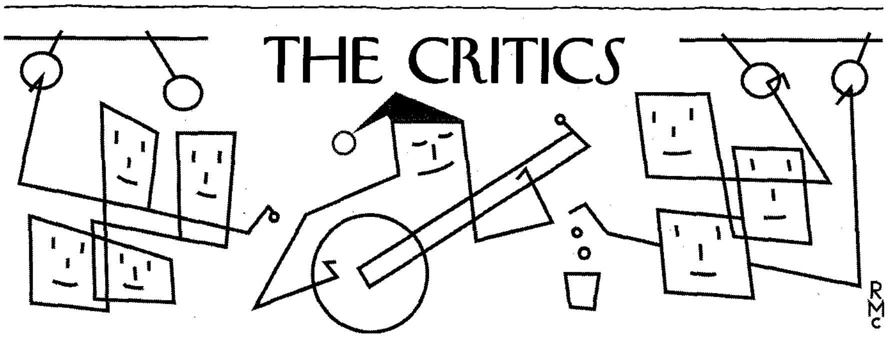
THE CRITICS



BOOKS

ON THE CONTRARY

A new look at the work of H. L. Mencken.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Many preëminent writers of the early twentieth century held views that now seem to us deplorable. But what Edith Wharton thought about Jews, or Hemingway about women, was enfolded in acts of imagination. They were novelists. H. L. Mencken, on the other hand, was a journalist, and so his opinions stand naked before us: his condemnation of democracy, his admiration for Germany (he opposed American entry into both world wars), his loathing of all idealists and reformers, including those "professional kikes" who in the thirties went around complaining that Adolf Hitler wasn't being nice to the Jews. Mencken grew up at the end of the nineteenth century, the days of social Darwinism. As he saw it, the poor deserved to be poor; the hanged had it coming. If they had been superior people, they would have had a superior fate. They might, for example, have been born into a prosperous bourgeois family, found immediately the work they were made for, pursued it joyfully for half a century, and kicked off each night at ten o'clock to go have a drink with the boys. That's what he did. What was the matter with them?

A man of such complacency (his word), not to speak of such "fatal want of generosity" (Alfred Kazin's words), might well, in our day, be picked up with tongs, if he were picked up at all. But Mencken deserves to be discussed, for he was the most influential journalist that America ever produced. So it is good to have a new biography, "The Skeptic: A Life of H. L. Mencken" (HarperCollins; $29.95), and good, too, that the job was done by Terry Teachout, an arts writer (*Commentary*, the *Times*, the Washington *Post*) who, apart from having a nice style, is conservative enough not to be shocked by Mencken, and therefore does not waste our time, in the manner of recent literary biographers, with his moral superiority to his subject.

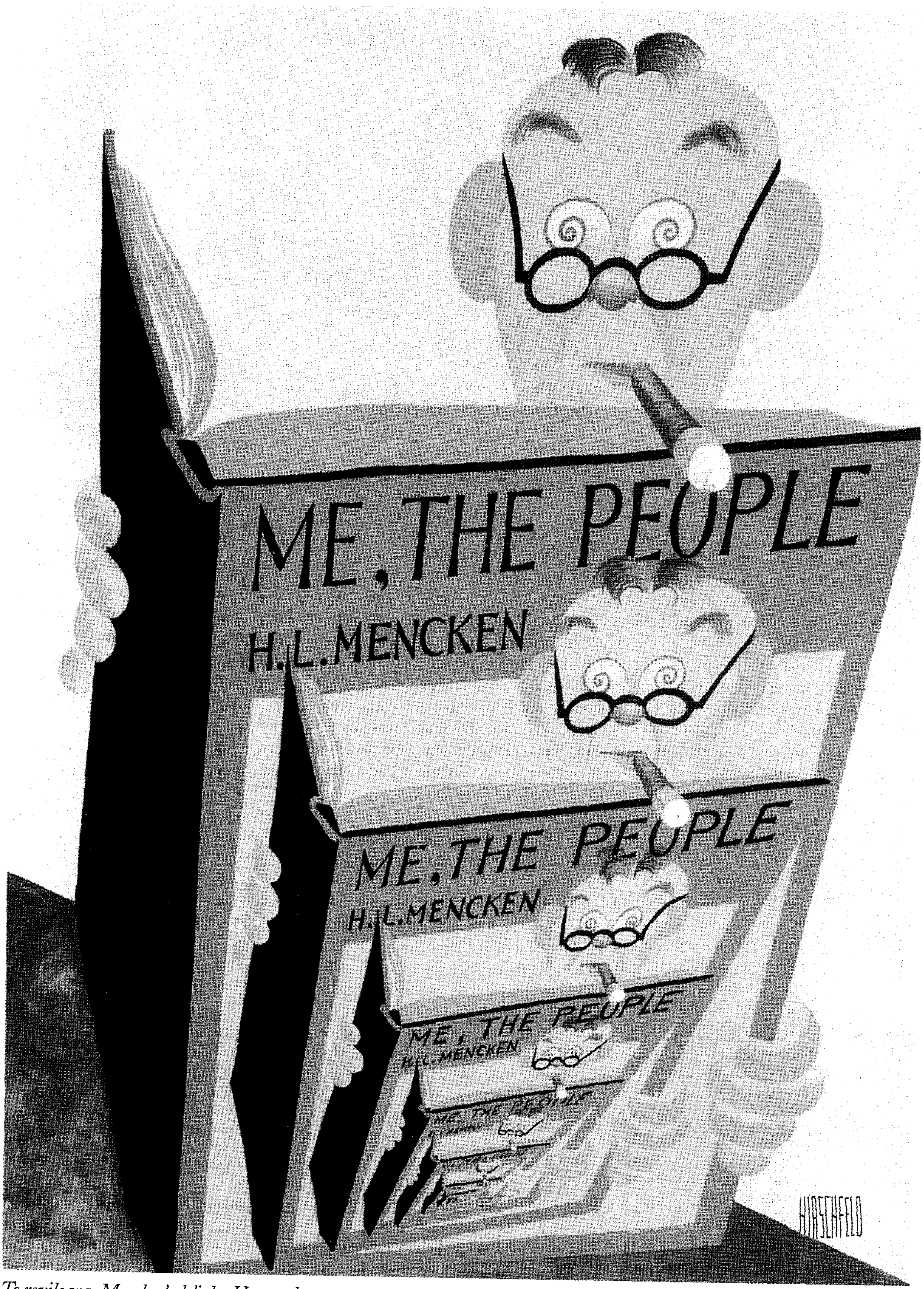
Henry Louis Mencken was born in 1880, in Baltimore, of German stock. As he told it, he had a serene childhood, digging in the back yard and reading great stacks of nineteenth-century literature. Like other bookish boys of the period, he dreamed of going into journalism, a world that, with its tough guys banging out their thoughts in spittoon-lined city rooms, suited his roistering temperament. At the age of eighteen, he presented himself at the Baltimore *Morning Herald;* by the age of twenty-five, he was the editor-in-chief of that paper. Then he went to the Baltimore *Sun*, where, with a few interruptions, he remained to the end of his writing life.

Newspapers weren't enough for him, though. The early nineteen-hundreds saw the birth of the American "smart magazine," aimed at deprovincializing the masses of people who, since the final decades of the nineteenth century, had been leaving the farm and moving to the cities. *The Smart Set*, subtitled "A Magazine of Cleverness," was founded in 1900; *Vanity Fair* in 1914; *The New Yorker* in 1925—all in Manhattan. In 1908, Mencken joined *The Smart Set*, as its book reviewer, and, in 1914, he and George Jean Nathan, the magazine's popular theatre critic, became joint editors-in-chief. But *The Smart Set* was light fare, elegant and snobbish, focussing on art and fashion. In 1924, Mencken and Nathan went off and founded their own magazine, *The American Mercury*. Mencken by now was tired of being confined to the arts; he wanted a journal of ideas, opinion. Nathan was not quite of the same mind, but within a year Mencken solved that problem by demoting his old friend to staff writer and taking over alone. The year after that, the magazine had a circulation of nearly eighty thousand. In 1928, Edmund Wilson wrote that half the country's college magazines were trying to sound like the *Mercury*.

But that wasn't enough, either. Mencken was a sort of writing machine. ("There is always a sheet of paper," he once said. "There is always a pen. There is always a way out.") Furthermore, he organized his life entirely around his work. He scorned the dissipation, alienation, expatriation of his fellow-writers of the twenties. He not only didn't move to Europe; he didn't move to New York, couldn't stand the place. Twice a month, he would take the train to Manhattan and spend a few days giving orders to his staff. But soon he was back in his beloved Baltimore, in the house he had lived in since the age of three, working all day in his upstairs study, checking in at the *Sun* in the evening, and then coming home to a plate of sandwiches laid out for him by his mother. He lived with her until he was forty-five, at which point she inconvenienced him by dying. He then married, and installed his bride in a duplex downtown, but when that lady, too, expired within a few years he moved right back home.

Given such habits, he had time to produce not just journalism but also books—on democracy, ethics, religion, you name it. In 1919, he brought out the volume that he will be remembered for, if for nothing else, in a hundred years: "The American Language," a long, scholarly, but also fun and funny study of what was probably the greatest love of his life, American vernacular speech. In this book you can find an inventory of antebellum terms for strong drink ("panther-sweat, nose-paint, red-eye, corn-juice, forty-rod, mountain-dew, coffin-varnish,

AL HIRSCHFELD, COURTESY THE MARGO FEIDEN GALLERIES, LTD.


ME, THE PEOPLE
H. L. MENCKEN
ME, THE PEOPLE
H. L. MENCKEN
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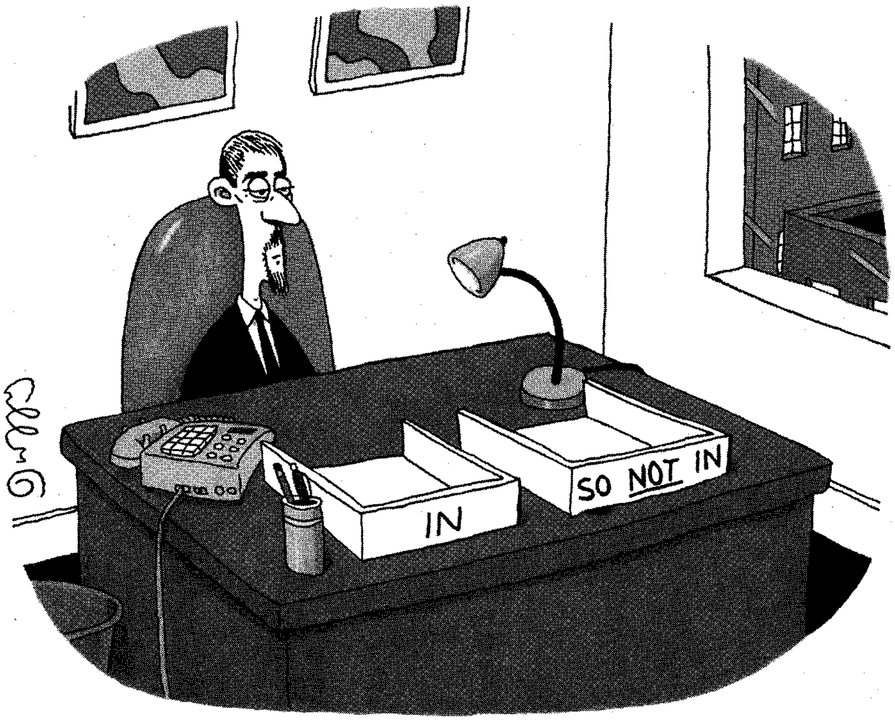
To revile was Mencken's delight. He saved every scrap of newsprint in which he was denounced as a public menace.

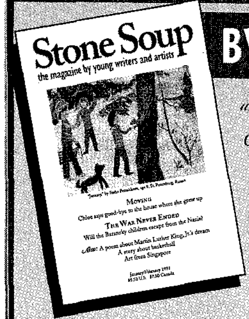


bust-head, stagger-soup, tonsil-paint, squirrel-whiskey") along with a thousand other excellent things. The year after "The American Language," Mencken banged out three more books. In 1925, two books were published *on* him, and the Chicago *Tribune* gave him a column, "As H.L.M. Sees It," which was syndicated throughout the United States. By then, pretty much everyone knew who H.L.M. was.

Why was he so valued? For his campaign against provincialism, to start with. Mencken was not the first person to notice that Americans of his time were divided between a vast majority who hadn't read much more than their Bible and a small, Brahmin minority who, in disassociating themselves from that hairy horde, had become equally narrow, producing a literature that seemed to be primarily about Bostonians having tea. In the nineteen-teens, various people were calling on American writers to deal with common life, in common language. Of these agitators, the most effective was Mencken. He was the reviewer who first brought Willa Cather, Theodore Dreiser, and Sinclair Lewis to national attention. (It is to the school of Dreiser and Lewis—the "revolt from the village" writers—that Mencken actually belongs, more than to the Jazz Age. He hated jazz.) But literature, to him, was a secondary concern. All his life, he had in his mind one dominating image: *Boobus americanus*, as he called it—the average American, ignorant, righteous, credulous, ready to follow any rabble-rouser who came along and yelled at him loud enough. In the United States, he wrote:

> The general average of intelligence, of knowledge, of competence, of integrity, of self-respect, of honor is so low that any man who knows his trade, does not fear ghosts, has read fifty good books, and practices the common decencies stands out as brilliantly as a wart on a bald head. . . . Here, more than anywhere else that I know of or have heard of, the daily panorama of human existence, of private and communal folly—the unending procession of governmental extortions and chicaneries, of commercial brigandages and throat-slittings, of theological buffooneries, of aesthetic ribaldries, of legal swindles and harlotries, of miscellaneous rogueries, villainies, imbecilities, grotesqueries, and extravagances—is so inordinately gross and preposterous . . . so steadily enriched with an almost fabulous daring and originality, that only the man who was born with a petrified diaphragm can fail to laugh himself to sleep every night, and awake every morning with all the eager, unflagging expectation of a Sunday-school superintendent touring the Paris peep-shows.

However disciplined his habits, Mencken, as this passage demonstrates, was a man of the nineteen-twenties in his love of naughty fun. He denounced puritanism, which he defined as "the



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"The New Yorker of the 8 to 13 set."
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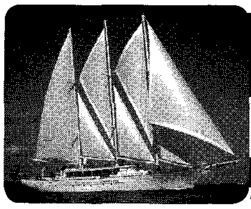

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haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." He hated religion for the same reason: it wanted to make him feel bad. Once, addressing the question of whether the state should intervene in cases where Christian Scientists refused medical help for their sick children, he said that we should probably let these youngsters die, since, with parents stupid enough to believe in Christian Science, their survival to reproductive age would lower the national I.Q.: "Being intelligent would become a criminal offense everywhere, as it already is in Mississippi and Tennessee." To revile was Mencken's delight, and when the reviled shot back he loved that, too. He saved every scrap of newsprint in which he was denounced as a public menace. In 1928, fearing that these materials would be lost to posterity, he got his publisher to bring out an anthology of them.

But the key to Mencken's popularity was his prose. His writing crackled with "blue sparks," as Joseph Conrad put it. His diction was something fantastic, a combination of American slang and a high, Latinate vocabulary that sounds as if it came from Dr. Johnson. That mix, of course, was part of his polemic, his belief that Americans should get smarter and dirtier, go high, go low. Often, he pushed that formula too hard. In my opinion, the long passage quoted above is overwrought. It is from one of Mencken's many volumes of collected essays, in which he habitually jacked up what he had put more plainly in his daily writing. I like his daily writing better. Here is a sample, from a 1933 article on the death of Calvin Coolidge:

> We suffer most when the White House bursts with ideas. With a World Saver preceding him (I count out Harding as a mere hallucination) and a Wonder Boy following him, [Coolidge] begins to seem, in retrospect, an extremely comfortable and even praiseworthy citizen. His failings are forgotten; the country remembers only the grateful fact that he let it alone. Well, there are worse epitaphs for a statesman. If the day ever comes when Jefferson's warnings are heeded at last, and we reduce government to its simplest terms, it may very well happen that Cal's bones, now resting inconspicuously in the Vermont granite, will come to be revered as those of a man who really did the nation some service.

Whatever you think of the sentiment, you have to love the prose, with its easy, conversational manner. Before Mencken,

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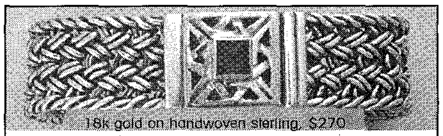

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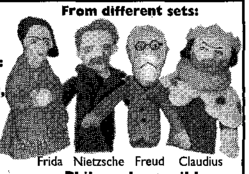

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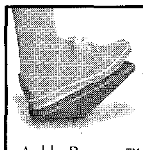

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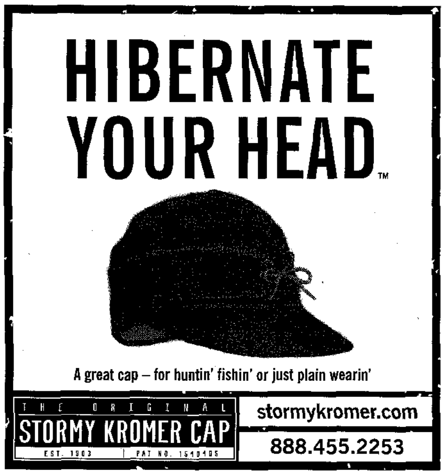
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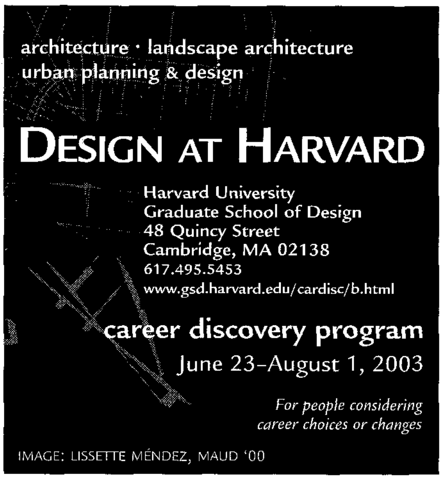
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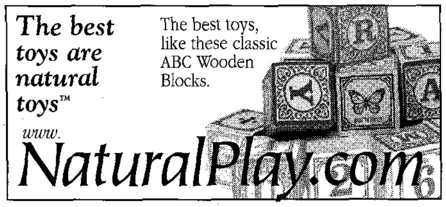
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we didn't often have such writing in the newspapers. He brought it in, and journalists have been using it ever since.

Mencken was a philistine. Though he spent many years as a book reviewer, he never cared much about art, least of all the experimental art of the twenties. To him, Stravinsky was a big nothing, Hemingway some sort of weird business that we needn't bother about. He cared only about ideas—or one idea, the American boob—and so he had only one emotion, the pleasure of despising. In Kazin's words, "Every Babbitt read him gleefully and pronounced his neighbor a Babbitt"—another Menckenian tradition that survives in today's journalism.

To Teachout, this narrowness is the key to Mencken's moral failings: "He looked at evil and saw ignorance." Hence his misunderstanding of Hitler. To him, the Führer was just another rabble-rouser, whom the excellent German people would soon tire of. (Teachout thinks that if Hitler hadn't shouted and pounded his fists, Mencken might have liked him better. He didn't mind autocrats; he was fond of Kaiser Wilhelm. The ex-Kaiser admired him, too, and, after reading his book on the errors of democracy, sent him a signed photograph.) Nor, when history proved him wrong, could he revise his views. To the end of his days, he never referred to the Holocaust in either his published work or his unpublished writings, the last of which were recently unsealed. (This, in part, is the occasion for Teachout's book, and the source of some of its most damaging material.) But, then, he took no public notice of the Depression until 1932, at which point he seemed to think it was mostly an idea invented by "charity mongers."

And so, in the thirties, he came to be regarded as a sort of crank. "Moderation in all things," he once wrote in his notebook. "Not too much life. It often lasts too long." It did for him. One day, while he was talking to his secretary, Mrs. Lohrfinck—he was now sixty-eight—his speech turned to babble, and he was rushed to Johns Hopkins. "Mr. Mencken has suffered a stroke," the doctor said the next day, "and I am sorry to say that he is recovering." The stroke left him unable to read or write. Nevertheless, he was back at his desk in short order and, with Mrs. Lohrfinck's help, published two more books. A few years later, he was again hauled off to the hospital, this time with a massive heart attack. The doctors told the Associated Press that there was no chance of his recovering. Everyone felt sad for the old geezer; the tributes rolled off the presses. Soon, he was drinking beer on the ward and sending people out for cigars. Again he went back to work, editing his notebook entries into a new volume. (It was a best-seller.) Finally—one imagines a huge hammer coming down out of the sky—he died in his sleep in 1956, at the age of seventy-five.

The history of Mencken's reputation as a political thinker has been odd. The leftists, of course, don't like him. Meanwhile, because of his contempt for religion, among other things, many conservatives have run like mad from any association with his name. (That doesn't include the kooks. Timothy McVeigh could quote Mencken from memory.) But Teachout, in his preface, says that in recent years some of Mencken's political views "have become a resurgent strain in American thought." He is referring to neoconservatism, a movement with which he is in sympathy. "I write, very broadly speaking, from [Mencken's] point of view," he says. Therefore he takes great pains to show us what, in Mencken's view, does not accord with his own. With regard to the Jew-baiting, he fills in the historical context, the pervasive anti-Semitism of the nineteen-twenties, and not just among Gentiles. (Mencken's 1930 book, "Treatise on the Gods," which describes the Jews as a race lacking in "courage, dignity, incorruptibility, ease, confidence," was published by a Jew, Alfred A. Knopf.) But, while shouldering his historical duties, Teachout does not commit the common error of historicists, the throwing up of hands. He tracks Mencken's anti-Semitism like a bird dog, not just in his unpublished writings but in his private papers. He tells us that some people have tried to cover it up, and he demonstrates how they have tailored their quotes accordingly.

My only serious quarrel with Teachout's book is that he doesn't spend enough time on Mencken's prose. He says that Mencken was America's greatest journalist, but he doesn't defend this claim at any length. On the other hand, he points

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us to the man who does the job. Edmund Wilson, he writes, was always Mencken's most comprehending critic. He was also Mencken's most generous critic—a touching fact, for Wilson was almost as far left as Mencken was far right, and though he was fifteen years younger, he was Mencken's competitor. He was the book reviewer for *The New Republic*, where he showed all the virtues that Mencken, at *The Smart Set* and the *Mercury*, so conspicuously lacked: an actual love of literary art, together with sophistication, judiciousness, and an ability to generalize, to say what the "scene" was. Wilson knew his gifts, and wished they were less rare. He called on American magazines to develop "a genuine literary criticism that should deal expertly with ideas and art, not merely tell us whether the reviewer 'let out a whoop' for the book or threw it out the window." He was talking about Mencken.

Nevertheless, Wilson always made excuses for Mencken, downplayed his faults, called the reader back to the "color and rhythm" of his prose, the "lucidity, order, and force" of his ideas. Mencken's rantings about *Boobus americanus* seemed to him unshaded, unhopeful, unrelenting, and he said so. Still, he made an argument for the boob. It was a fictional creation, he said, a work of art: "This character is an ideal monster exactly like the Yahoo of Swift, and it has almost the same dreadful reality. This 'boob' has impressed himself on the imagination of our general public in a way that has not been equaled by any other recent literary creation, with the possible exception of Scott Fitzgerald's flapper." And if, in consequence, Mencken made naïveté and prudery unfashionable, got Americans to start thinking more critically, this was "an achievement of some importance," he felt.

Others have offered the same tribute. Mencken was "a stimulant," Kazin said, and if his work was not wisdom it was "an introduction to wisdom." Despite his failures as a literary critic, he probably deserves some credit for the great crop of critics who came after him—not just Wilson but the whole school of the forties and fifties (Trilling, Kazin, Jarrell, others), assured both in their ideas and in their excellent, lay-it-down prose. Wilson says that after the publication of "The American Language" people started speaking and writing in the American language. Maybe that was contribution enough. ♦

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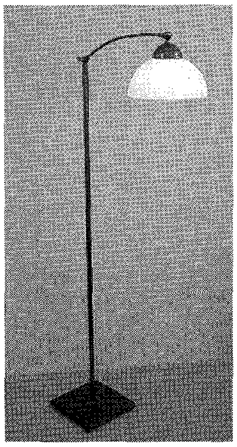

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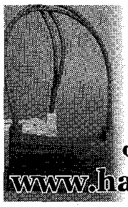

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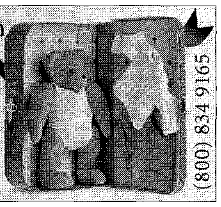

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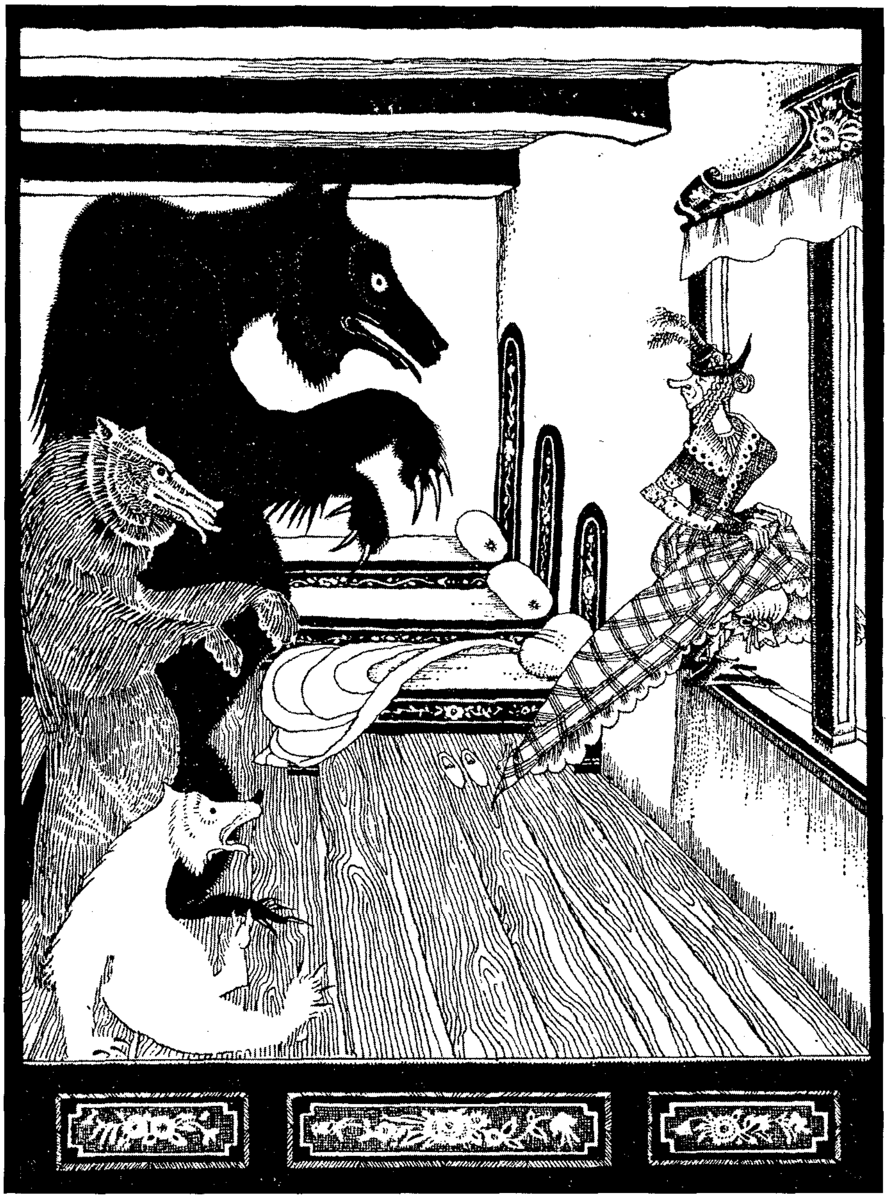
MAGIC KINGDOMS

What is a fairy tale, anyway?

BY ADAM GOPNIK



A new book of fairy tales includes old familiars, the stranger classics, and even some duds.

At the sand-logged, mildewy tail end of a beach vacation, four exhausted parents take two seven-year-olds to a rainy-day play, "The Fairy Tale Detective": the tales of the Three Bears and Hansel and Gretel and Red Riding Hood, retold as though in a film noir, complete with raincoated detectives and lynx-eyed blondes. Puzzled looks from the seven-year-olds: the kids, the startled parents realize, just don't know the fairy tales, don't know the material or the usual spirit in which they're told. At last, one parent whispers, "It's a parody, a kind of joke—you know, like the Mr. Peabody stories on the 'Bullwinkle' videos." Instant enlightenment crosses their features; oh, that familiar thing, and, almost visibly, the work of interpretation—O.K., what's being kidded here? Although "Beauty and the Beast" and, perhaps, "The Little Mermaid" are part of the children's cultural baggage—or, rather, among their cultural parachutes; *we* are their cultural baggage—the tales exist for them only in highly sweetened, song-filled forms. A thought crosses at least one parental mind as he shepherds the children toward the exit and the fried clams: Is it possible that we have actually come to the end of fairy tales as an available, rather than an archival, entertainment? Fairy tales, however many times they are transformed, depend in some part for their effect on an air of sincerity, of urgent seriousness. For the not merely wise but wised-up children of this new century, other tales and other, more skittish ways of telling seem to have usurped the old stories and styles. Which means that the fairy tale could be headed for the place where all our good used-up things go, America's Island of Misfit Toys, the college English department.

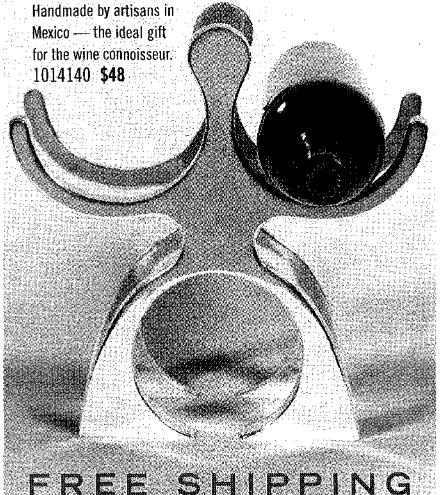
Like a fairy godmother, along comes an encyclopedic book about fairy tales, prepared by a literature professor, which will test whether we must entomb or can yet enliven the genre. "The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales" (Norton; $35), edited by Maria Tatar, a professor at Harvard, is the latest in Norton's long line of annotated classics, a form that Martin Gardner invented and perfected, forty years ago, with "The Annotated Alice" and "The Annotated Snark": a familiar text with lots of glosses, explanations, and reflections. Annotating a classic is hard, since it involves both discreetly explaining the obvious and modestly explaining the unobvious, while being willing to stand on a soapbox in the margin now and then to give a speech. Charm and quarrelsomeness in equal parts are necessary. Tatar is well fit for all of it. Some of her notes are startling but true (of "The Little Match Girl" she writes, "The attribute 'little' before the name of a girl in a story for children often spells the character's doom"); others seem appropriately schoolmarmish ("In carrying out domestic chores, Snow White moves into a new developmental stage"); and others are nicely cheerleading ("Beauty compares favorably in every way with her two sisters").

More potent even than Tatar's annotations are her choices: a formidable scholar of the unschooled, she rummages through all possible tellings and retellings to finally choose the version of a familiar story that strikes her as in one way or another definitive. She includes old familiars ("Little Red . . . ," "Jack and . . . ," "Beauty and . . . "), mostly in their first printed forms, and the stranger classics ("The Juniper Tree," "East of the Sun and West of the Moon"), and even throws in some duds—for the Folk have their "Mister Moonlight"s and "Revolution 9"s, too—like "Molly Whuppie." She also includes hundreds of illustrations by the great fairy-tale illustrators—many, of sad necessity, no more than postage-stamp size. (For Tatar, as for this viewer, Maxfield Parrish's dreamy northern lights carry away the laurels against Arthur Rackham's thorny linearities.)

Gardner, in his pioneering Nortons, had to fight the two-headed Jabberwock of the psychoanalytic and the psychedelic readings of "Alice." Tatar has her own battles to fight, with an alliterative two-headed creature made up of the snapping heads of Bruno Bettelheim and Bill Bennett. Tatar's notes throughout chide Bettelheim's Freudian, and extremely influential, "Uses of Enchantment" for loading the stories with the child-hating, punitive morality of turn-of-the-century Vienna. "Hansel and Gretel," for instance, is in Bettelheim's view a story about the "oral greed" of children. Hansel and Gretel enact their hostility toward a symbolic mother, who, because she is a child's provider, is also, in a neat Freudian flip, the withholder of nourishment. At the end of the story, the children have mastered their "oral anxieties." But surely H. and G. are not anxious about eating; they are anxious about being eaten. As Tatar points out, "Bettelheim suggests that the real source of evil in the story is nothing more than an alter ego of the children."

On her other sword arm, Tatar duels the tutting finger of Bennett, and his "Book of Virtues" brand, which, with its insistence that the great fairy tales teach timeless and universal cultural values, she writes, "endorses a kind of mindless reading that fails to interrogate the cultural values embedded in the stories written once upon a time." Fairy tales, she argues, rarely dramatize, much less endorse, the conservative Republican virtues of honesty and plain dealing and ascension from humble beginnings through hard work. Instead, they more often celebrate the triumphs of feckless sons who, through luck,

KAY NIELSEN "THE STORY OF THE THREE BEARS" [1930] / COURTESY MARIA TATAR



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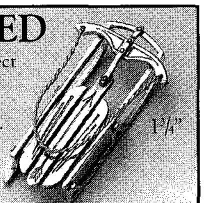

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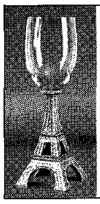

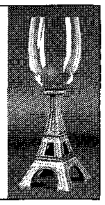

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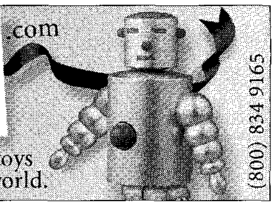

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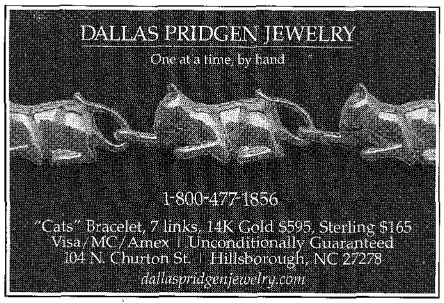
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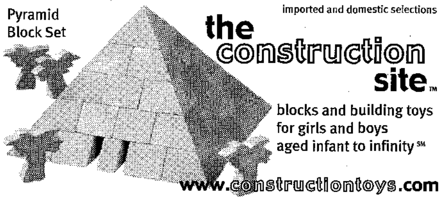
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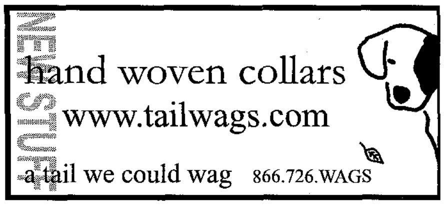
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ANCIENT STORY

At midnight I went outside to look at the
full moon. Bats were feasting on mosquitoes.
Out in the field a coyote was howling. The field
was bathed in a soft yellow light, and I could
see him, his head thrown back, like a passionate
tenor in an eerie opera. I wanted to join him, but
my howling was rusty. I walked slowly and quietly
in his direction. Several times bats swooped within
an inch of my face. My blood was rushing. The coyote
saw me and went right on singing. I froze in my
tracks. It was beautiful. His song told some
ancient tale of grief and sorrow. I started to
whimper. And that turned into squealing. Then I
was bawling and weeping. Kind of blubbering, with
some yips and yelps thrown in. My head thrown back,
I began to wail. And I couldn't stop wailing, it
felt so good. I had wakened the whole neighborhood,
and now they, too, were wailing.

—*James Tate*

cunning, and conniving help from wiser counsellors, manage to win their way to unearned wealth and power.

Tatar's choices search but do not settle a central historical question: Are the stories that we conventionally group together as fairy tales really folktales in origin, a repository of popular wisdoms and oral tradition, which came to rest in the hands of a few compilers in the nineteenth century, or are they highly artificial, manufactured romantic literary productions, pre-distressed, like bluejeans, to look the part? This is a hot subject in fairy-tale academe; new studies of the Brothers Grimm and the English fairy-tale compilers make much of their ideological polishing and their nationalist agendas. One new scholarly book, "Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale Tradition" (Pennsylvania; $36.50), by Ruth Bottigheimer, even makes the case that the fairy tale, far from rising from the ground as a rural folk tradition, was invented by a city-bound sixteenth-century Italian literary hack, Zoan Francesco Straparola, in his "Pleasant Nights." Straparola, a freewheeling entrepreneur who seems to belong more to eighteenth-century London than to sixteenth-century Venice, put together "the urban tale's humble protagonists with the courtly tale's magic," combining the manners of Boccaccio with the matter of commedia dell'arte. Where in the old stories magic brought you grace, in Straparola's stories magic brought you money, and, in the joining together of these two kinds of tales, a new genre was born. The "fairy tale," if one accepts Straparola's primacy, is an invented tradition, like the kilt or haggis.

Tatar deals with this subject by avoiding it: without proposing any rule about what's put in and what's kept out, her book includes obvious folktales retold; tales so thoroughly remade as to be unrecognizable; and nineteenth-century literary confections that are no closer to folk tradition than "A Christmas Carol." There are literary contes, like Perrault's "Donkeyskin," so stiff with polish that they could stand up and promenade in Versailles, and there are Hans Christian Andersen's parables and allegories, which are about as much folktales as Tchaikovsky is folk music.

At the same time, Tatar seems, throughout her notes, very friendly to the idea that fairy tales represent a long line of vernacular folk (and particularly feminine) stories that were told by generations of women and happened to land in the opportunistic lap of a compiler, to be retold, with the old amorality still shining gaily through. So fairy tales are not part of a bad folk tradition (masculine, nationalist, and *völkisch*) but part of a good folk tradition (feminine, universal, subversive, and anti-patriarchal). This combination of beliefs—fairy tales are wherever you find them; fairy tales are an oral feminist tradition—gives Tatar's collection its peculiar shape, as if a CD of folk songs included not just "Down in the Valley" but Stephen Foster and Bob Dylan and Irving Berlin and the Blues Brothers, too, while the liner notes insisted that the beauty of folk songs lies in their unstudied popularity.

At one level, of course, it is true that even manufactured entertainment can be folk art, since everybody is *somebody's* folk. (Vegas lounge acts doubtless revere Dean Martin the way blues archivists revere Leadbelly, as part of the dim epic past of their form.) If Hans Christian Andersen didn't begin as folk literature, it is now. Still, one would expect a scholar to give a scholarly argument for what's in and what's not, and it is surprising not to see it.

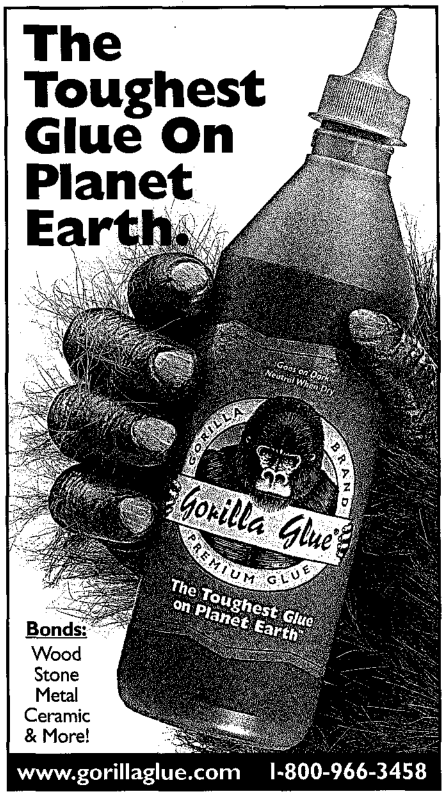
If Tatar doesn't offer an organizing idea about what fairy tales are, she does offer a strong view about what they usually include, and that ends up doing more or less the same work. She makes a point of not minimizing—indeed, whenever possible, of underlining—the violence and horror of fairy stories. We are not spared the blinding of Rapunzel's prince or that of Cinderella's stepsisters (in one version, their eyes are pecked out). "Today we recognize that fairy tales are as much about conflict and violence as about enchantment," she writes. "When we read 'Cinderella,' we are fascinated more by her trials and tribulations at the hearth than by her social elevation. We spend more time thinking about the life-threatening chant of the giant in 'Jack and the Beanstalk' than about Jack's acquisition of wealth. And Hansel and Gretel's encounter with the seemingly magnanimous witch in the woods haunts our imagination long after we have put the story down."

But then it is in the nature of storytelling to depend for its spell on establishing the credibility of the villain's evil, from Satan to the Wedgie Woman, and this does not mean that the story's real hero is not God or Captain Underpants. It is not, as Blake wrote, that Milton was on the side of the Devil without knowing it because he was a poet. It is that Milton was on the Devil's side because, as a poet, he was on the side of sides. Having two dimensions, one good and one bad, is all that gives a poem, or a fairy tale, three.

Still, Tatar is surely right to sense in the cruelty and violence of fairy tales some key to their spell. What, after all, is the difference between a fairy tale and a legend, a parable, or a moral story? We sense it at once: it is the presence of magic, meaning not just cool weird stuff but an unpredictable suspension of the regularities of natural and human order, an arbitrary and therefore sometimes terrifying lifting of the rules, including the rules of justice and mercy. Magic—completely unearned and undeserved good fortune or misfortune—is at the heart of the fairy tale, what gives it its special flavor. The giant is evil, the giant's wife friendly; the boy is a fool, the boy gets the beans. Rumpelstiltskin outwits the girl and has his hands on the baby; a sudden bit of luck in the forest dooms him. Bottigheimer tells us that when the Council of Trent, in the sixteenth century, got hold of Straparola's book it deleted the words *fortuna* and *fato* wherever they were found. This was a sharp bit of literary criticism; the magic of fairy tales is the pagan magic of fortune, rather than of virtue, and of fate, rather than of faith, or even grace. The moral of every fairy tale is not "Virtue rewarded" but "You never know" (which bean will sprout, which son will triumph).

Tatar's mixed-up choices do have an internal logic. Any story with random magic and an arbitrary allotment of ascents and punishments can justly be called a fairy tale. At the end of her book, one comes to feel that the fairy tale, like satire, is a genre with a certain shape and spirit that pops up all over the place, rather than a form with a single history. It is in its origins hybrid and bastardized. Andersen's cruel, mysterious "Snow Queen," though an invention, is the truest of fairy tales.

There is something about the pagan, or pre-Christian, quality of true fairy tales that seems to sit well with the feminism that Tatar finds in them, too. By escaping from morality into magic, fairy tales have their own erotic candor. In a moral conte, the Princess would learn something from the pea. In a fairy tale, she just feels it. The average reader may not be prepared for how many fairy stories seem to deal, in fairly direct ways, with a girl's first experience of sex. "East of the Sun and West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of the Moon," "Beauty and the Beast," "Donkeyskin" (with its incestuous material), "The Frog King," "Rapunzel" (who lets down her hair only to become pregnant, and mystified by it) are about a woman's discovery of the animal nature of man. A beast abducts a girl and marries her, and she either gets used to the beast or finds out he's not so beastly. Reading Tatar's book, one thinks of how, for many thousands of years and generations, women must have approached the marriage bed armed only with rumor and fear, and how the good or bad news about what went on there got passed along in the form of warning and enticing stories: you'll like it in the end, or else you won't, or else it may kill you; the wolf will eat you until you're bleeding or else you will eat the wolf. Contemplating the centuries of this dread almost makes a father grateful for Christina Aguilera; whatever other horrors our daughters may suffer, a lack of sexual awareness won't be one of them.

If fairy tales are where you find them, where can we find them now? The "Star Wars" films, like Tolkien's books, are surely epic rather than fairy, with a neat morality and the overriding lesson that blood (Luke Skywalker's or Aragorn's) will always tell. C. S. Lewis's Narnia tales uneasily mix an optimistic Christian morality with a darker and more intuitive pagan one. (Lewis is creepy on the subject of his witches' bare white arms.) The magic of the Harry Potter books is that there is no magic in them; they depend entirely on the idea that what looks like magic is really something regular you learn, like algebra or French verbs.

To this reader, at least, only a few modern children's classics have the necessary mixture of mystery and amoral magic to count as true fairy tales, and high among these are Barrie's "Peter Pan" and P. L. Travers's Mary Poppins books. Both are undependable in the way good fairy stories ought to be: Peter Pan is a hero, but, like a true fairy-tale hero, his motives are suspect and his desires vainglorious; Mary Poppins is essentially benevolent, but she is also cruel, conceited, and unpredictable. That both these pure expressions of the fairy spirit came so recently, and out of an urban capital of empire under extreme stress, is, this Christmas, at once a scary and a hopeful thought. All our fairy tales are fractured now. But then it seems they always were. ♦

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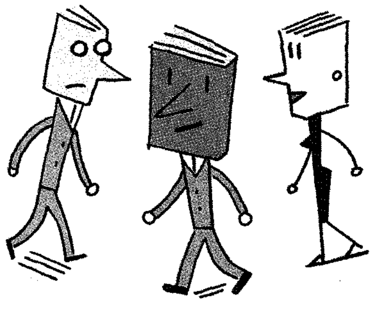

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PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

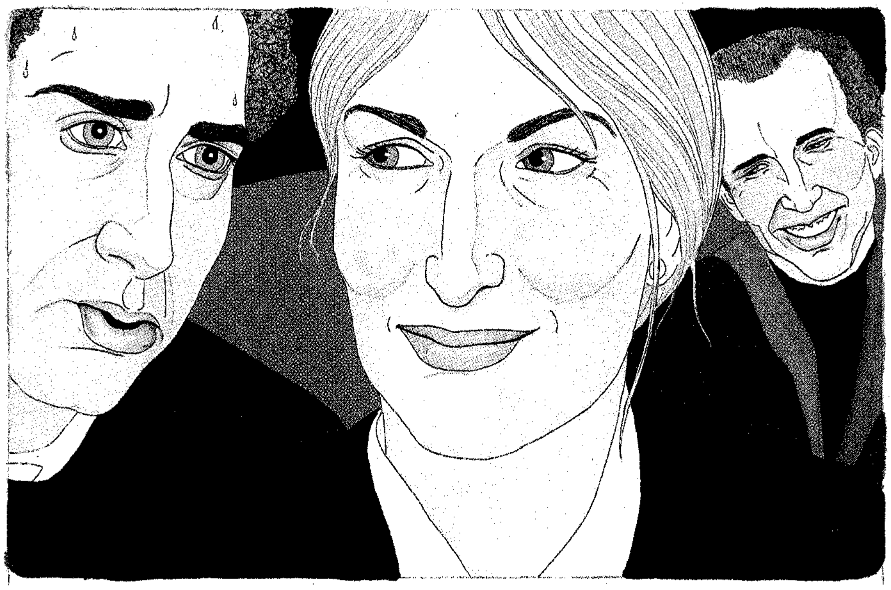
THE CURRENT CINEMA

HOTHOUSE

"Adaptation" and "Solaris."

BY DAVID DENBY

"Adaptation," the new experimental comedy by the team of Spike Jonze and Charlie Kaufman ("Being John Malkovich"), begins with the crisis of a screenwriter—the crisis of Charlie Kaufman himself (Nicolas Cage), who has been hired to adapt the book "The Orchid Thief," by Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep), a staff writer for *The New Yorker.* Kaufman, as he's portrayed in the movie, is a self-doubting wreck at forty—a sweaty man with thinning hair who wears a flannel shirt in Los Angeles. Charlie's problem is serious. Susan Orlean's book, which grew out of an article published in 1995, chronicling her adventures among the orchid lovers of Florida, is "great sprawling *New Yorker* stuff." That is, it's a nightmare—observant and ruminative but lacking the kind of clear arc that can be easily shovelled into a movie. "Let it *exist!*" Charlie shouts, in celebration of the book's special tone. It is one of the many hortatory messages he delivers to himself or to his glib brother Donald (Cage again), also a screenwriter, who moves in with Charlie and whose brain, in a mockery of Charlie's troubles, is teeming with trashy but highly producible movie ideas. Donald loves violent melodrama and startling character turns, exactly the sort of reverberant clichés that Charlie wants to avoid.



Nicolas Cage and Meryl Streep in a movie about the difficulty of making a movie.

LARA TOMLIN

But it's one thing to dismiss Donald as a hack, another to figure out what to do with "The Orchid Thief." Charlie admires the book because, he says, it's like life—it doesn't offer a clean resolution and transportable lessons—and he falls in love with its prose, which Meryl Streep reads with a precision and delicacy that would thrill any writer lucky enough to have the experience. Streep, who did a close approximation of Nora Ephron's voice and manner in "Heartburn," does not try to impersonate Susan Orlean. She draws her character not from life but from Orlean's prose, which is watchful, given to melancholy asides, but ready for anything. Streep has caught a writer's wariness and calculation: you see her thinking and weighing before she asks a question. Streep's Susan Orlean is a semifiction, and the real Charlie Kaufman, for all I know, may be nothing like the self-lacerating hysteric we see onscreen. "Adaptation" is

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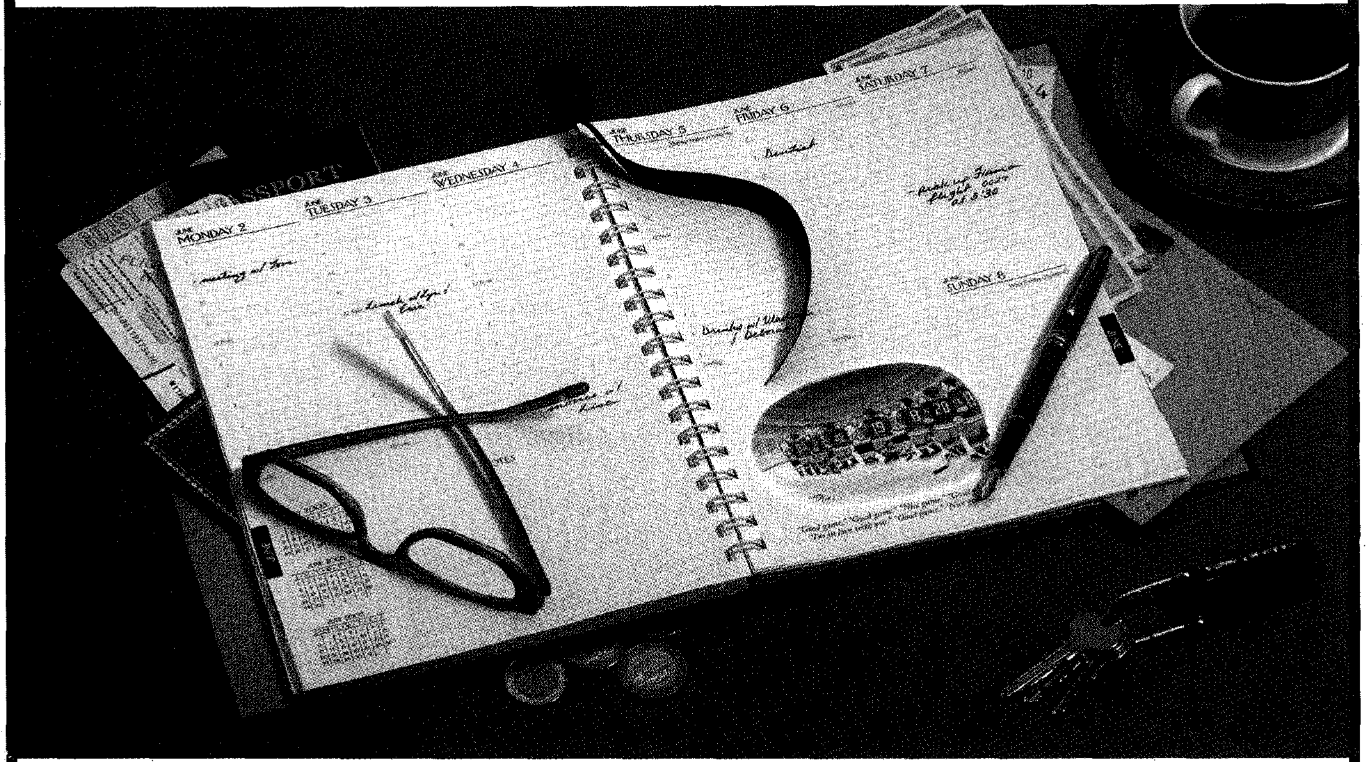

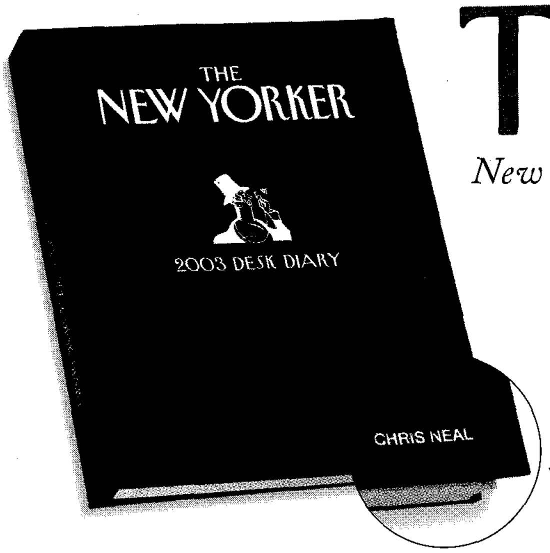

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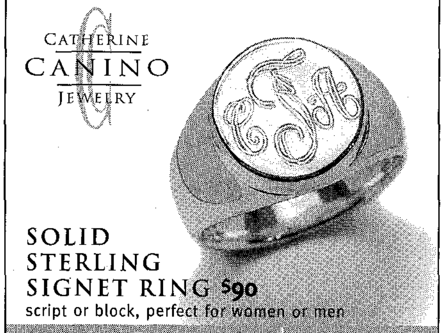

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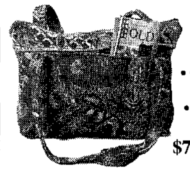

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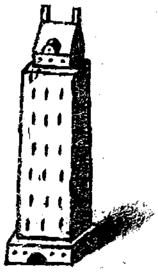
a fiction about the making of fiction. It jumps back and forth among Charlie's feverish self-doubts, his erotic fantasies, and the story he is attempting to write.

Listening to someone complain about how hard it is to produce fiction isn't usually very interesting in itself. O.K., the dog ate your homework, but most of us still want the seamless finished product, not the shreds. Yet this movie, before it falls apart at the end, is resourceful and light on its feet. Like "Malkovich," it's perceptive and funny, and some of its whims—a digression on Darwin, Charlie's fuming tirades—are blithely original. Spike Jonze has a talent for the gently bizarre image, the startling shift in context which makes a weird kind of sense. He and Kaufman are trying to loosen up the language of American movies, and they swat different kinds of representation around like a shuttlecock.

The story, when Charlie is able to tell parts of it (we see what he writes), has the allure of oddity. Orlean spent a lot of time over a two-year period hanging out with one John Laroche (Chris Cooper), a man who was arrested while stealing a rare orchid from a Florida wilderness preserve. Laroche's scheme was to hide behind a group of Seminole cronies, who are exempt from Florida's endangered-species law. If he had got away with the theft, he was going to clone and mass-produce the orchid and make a killing. Laroche is one of those strange, scraggly Florida men, unsocialized but erudite in many ways—a moralist, a theorist, a swamp-bred crank, a borderline criminal. By worldly standards, he's a failure with missing front teeth; by a writer's standards, he's a compelling egotist and adventurer, with an appealing streak of rue. Orlean is impressed by Laroche's horticultural passions, by passion in general, which she claims to lack in her own life, and her own unhappiness intersects with his. Chris Cooper has often held his roles in an ironlike grip of seriousness—the lines of his face are like the Eleventh Commandment. Playing this intelligent and morose flake, however, he lets his limbs fly; he even has a raffish charm. Insofar as any man with his front teeth gone can be sexy, he pulls it off.



The book's orchid lore is fascinating, and I wish there were more of it in the movie, more of the flower's hold over people as a kind of horticultural siren. Charlie never does figure out what to do with all the descriptive and ruminative stuff, and he rages at himself. At times, Cage's hangdog look verges on the masochistic, but the part is written with such detailed self-disgust and delivered with such gusto that it goes over the top into comedy and saves us from embarrassment. In any case, Charlie's dilemma is not just a case of personal funk. Any screenwriter with intellectual ambition would be frightened by an industry that demands (and pays handsomely for) conventional thinking. Kaufman and Jonze portray Charlie as a sweating loser because, in the big-money environment of Hollywood, that's inevitably how he would appear to himself—no matter how high-minded you are, you really can't mock the monetary success exploding all around you. The filmmakers are expressing their own anger and ambivalence about the movie business, and "Adaptation," for most of its length, is a furious act of rebellion.

Donald the hack keeps touting the monkey-see, monkey-do lessons of Robert McKee, a real-life screenwriting teacher. Eventually, the great actor Brian Cox turns up as McKee and does what appears to be a roaring caricature of an impassioned teacher. But the distraught Charlie, to our amazement, is impressed by McKee's platitudes, and abruptly turns the orchid story into a violent melodrama after all. What then envelops Orlean and Laroche and Charlie (who writes himself into the story) is awful nonsense. Drugs, guns, car crashes, alligators—the movie becomes a complete shambles, and far more desperate than anything conventional filmmakers would fall into. It's hard to know how to read this mess of an ending. Is it a way of throwing in the towel after a long strug-

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gle and "adapting" to Hollywood? Or is it meant to be taken as a savage parody of selling out? The first possibility is sad, the second condescending to the audience. The trouble with experimental comedies is that it's often impossible to figure out how to end them. But at least this one is intricate fun before it blows itself up.

Jeremy Davies, the pale, wispy young actor who starred in the independent film "Spanking the Monkey," and then played the cowardly soldier in "Saving Private Ryan," is the only thing I enjoyed in Steven Soderbergh's science-fiction movie "Solaris." Davies has foxy eyes and a dark silky beard, and, as one of the spooked crewmen in a spaceship that has been put under a spell, he speaks in tiny fragments propelled by the darting, angular movements of his hands. Davies's Kabuki act is so eccentrically hip that it provides comic relief in what turns out to be a very painful exercise in the higher solemnity. George Clooney travels from Earth and joins the ship near the planet Solaris, a pulsing mass of blue and pink intelligence which seems to be sending to the ship certain . . . *things*. These . . . *things* are replicants of human beings formed out of the memories of the crew. They are very upsetting—that's about all one finds out about them. Much of the dialogue, which Soderbergh wrote himself (the material comes from a novel by Stanislaw Lem and a Russian film version from 1972, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky), consists of rhetorical questions and unfinished sentences. Clooney and Natascha McElhone, who plays his dead wife reincarnated as a thing, stare and stare wordlessly, and the mood of frozen bewilderment is sustained by a color scheme of varying shades of blue and by electronic music that arrives in prolonged slabs, pinning your brain to the base of your skull. I know there are intelligent people who are awed by this sort of deep-dish magical mystery tour, but surely something is wrong with a movie when you can't tell a live character from a dead one and you don't care which is which. ♦

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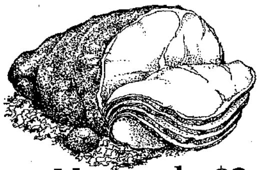

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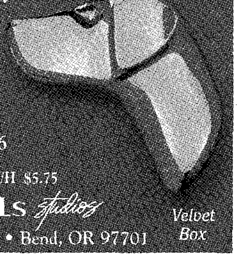

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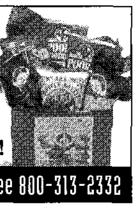

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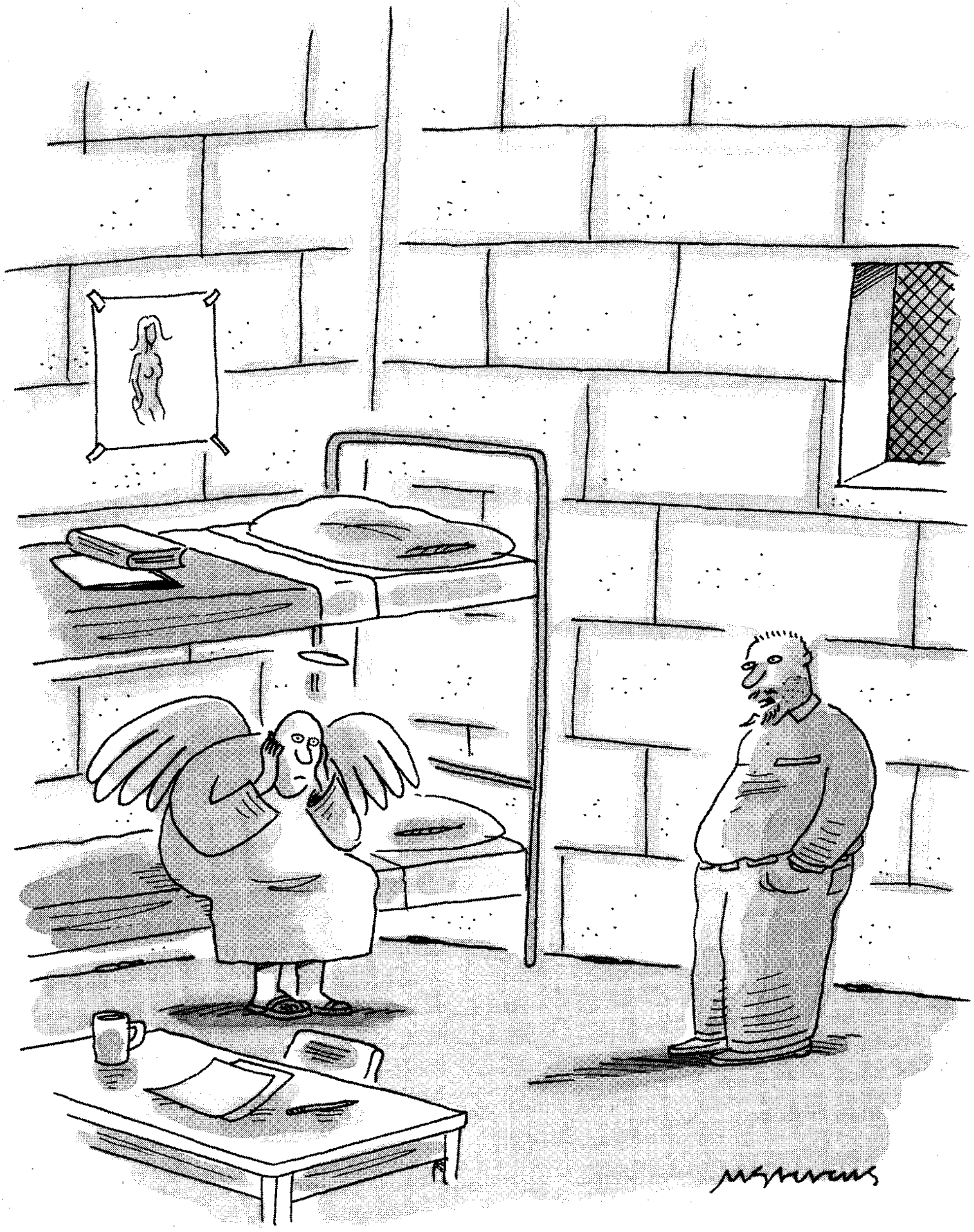

"I'd lose the dress."

The New Yorker Cartoon Caption Contest is a venerable tradition, but not nearly as venerable as the announcement of the Caption Contest results. This year's image, a Mick Stevens drawing of a grizzled prisoner sharing his cell with an angel, inspired almost five thousand readers to submit captions.

For the most part, entrants speculated on why the angel looked so glum. Some readers wrote "touched by an angel" jokes that alluded to the recent scandals in the Catholic Church; others proposed a simpler rationale ("Would you be happier with the top bunk?"). Still others worked along financial lines (perhaps the angel was a corrupt executive) or political ones (John Ashcroft and protected airspace were implicated in the angel's imprisonment).

Runners-up included: "Some guardian angel you turned out to be" (Jen Garrison Stuber); "Just for purposes of discussion, how far could you carry, say, another person?" (Jeremy Rudnick); "Yeah, the devil made me do it, too" (Christi Kelsey); "Try sleeping on your stomach" (Robert Brooks); and "Cheer up, you'll probably get time off for good behavior" (Arlene Maresca). The winner? "I'd lose the dress." Simple, elegant, and, of course, funny, it was written by Simon Hatley. ♦

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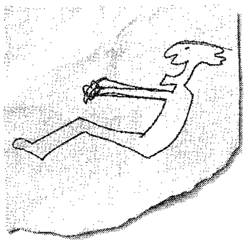

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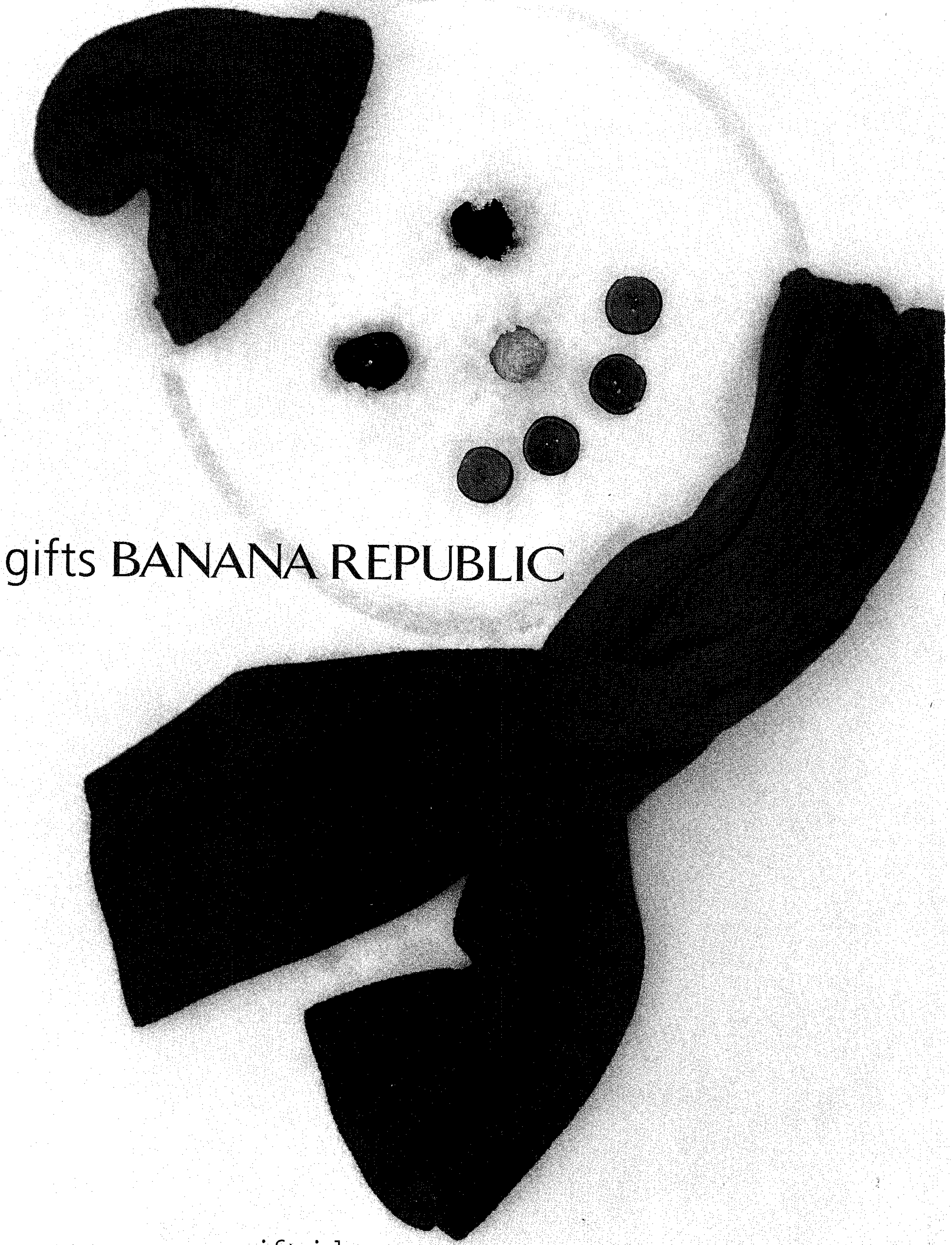

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